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# GRACECHURCH

JOHN AYSCOUGH



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# GRACECHURCH



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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND  
MONSIGNOR GEORGE AMBROSE BURTON  
LORD BISHOP OF CLIFTON

*My dear Lord Bishop,—*

*When I asked if I might dedicate this book to you I knew you would say "Yes," because I knew you would never stop to consider whether the dedication of such a book were worth having or no. There is a prudent sort of Dedicatee who has no notion of accepting a present that can be of no use to him : his idea of a Dedication is that it should increase his accidental glory, so to speak, here on earth : where that seems unlikely, he modestly rejects the proffered inscription. He is no relation of your Lordship. I suspect your notion would be that the best use of a Dedication is to help the book dedicated, by letting folk see that it has at all events a respectable godfather.*

*But you not only said yes : you spoke of the affectionately-meant offering as an honour that you would accept gladly—only you could not understand why you should be given the part of Mæcenæ. I suspect your Lordship is the only Catholic in England who would not understand that.*

*Remembering, however, what sort of great things Mæcenæ stood patron of, I might, had you been different, have feared an innuendo, as if you had been asking to what little things you were being queerly invited to stand sponsor : but I know you too*



*well and long to fear any scornful side-thrust at your hands :  
you would ever answer*

*Full knightly without scorn,*

*for you have that Arthurian spirit that would reject scorn as  
not dealt in by the noblest.*

*But if a man were halt or hunched, in him,  
By those whom God had made full-limbed and strong,  
Scorn was allowed as part of his defect.*

*It is now many years since I had my first letter from your Lordship : it began by begging me not to be angry because some letter of my own had lain a while unanswered. The admissibility of being cross with bishops was a new idea ; but it was not the only one suggested by your letter. One of Elizabeth's children—the delightful Elizabeth of the German Garden—interrupted her description of the Exodus by demanding fervently “ Do you love Moses ? ” And she had to adjust, as it were, her affections, in regard of that tremendous personage, before replying.*

*I had to adjust mine. I do love many bishops now, but I cannot forget who taught me. And, however little else there may be in this book to make it a fit offering to you, my dear Lord, it has that one fitness that it is a record of faithful and fond affection. The thread on which these Gracechurch Papers are strung together is stronger than any of consecutive narrative working towards the climax of a plot, for it is the simple and indestructible one of love for the dear old place and the kind, dear people who lived there. It was for the sake of being again in their quaint company that the small episodes were called up out of childish and boyish memories : and that is why there is as little autobiography as possible, and why the total exclusion of anything autobiographical was impossible. Again that is why there is really no last chapter to the book : a last chapter could only have been personal, the rather mournful record of a last*

## DEDICATION

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*visit, when most of the old friends were offended at a thing I had just done—the best thing I ever did. When we meet again they will have come round, will have forgiven what displeased them then, and will know that it was not wrong.*

*Thanking you, my dear Lord Bishop, for accepting this trivial gift, and for all the kindness and encouragement of many years, and asking your Blessing.*

*I am, My Lord,*

*Yours affectionately and most respectfully,*

JOHN AYSCOUGH.



*These Records of Gracechurch and  
its folk were published serially in  
the "Month," by the kindness of whose  
Editor they appear now as a book.*

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# GRACECHURCH

## CHAPTER I

### SAL FISH

FOR so small a place Gracechurch had a large proportion of "genteel" houses. To be genteel was the acme of social success in the little midland town : money was never abundant enough to elevate any of its citizens to distinction. No one had ever made a fortune there, nor, indeed, would it be easy to imagine how anyone could : there was no "trade," though of course we had our tradesmen, generally two of each sort. There were two drapers, Landford's for the genteel, and Lawson's for the common folk—it no more occurred to Gracechurch that it should not talk of the "common people" than that it would be wrong to speak of "independent gentry." There were two booksellers, Waugh's and Johnson's, the former sending in meagre bills every half year to the gentry (not largely for books), the latter doing a humbler cash trade with our inferiors, for whom it filled its windows about the beginning of February with appalling Valentines a yard long by six or eight inches broad—the broadness of another kind being

A

incalculable in inches. Miss Mildstone, who was gentility itself, once received one of these anonymously, and for the rest of her life was ill with apprehension every February, till Valentine's Day was safely past, lest the post should bring her another. No human eye but hers had ever seen that Valentine after it left the sender's hands ; even the memory of it was always enough to reduce her to tears.

Johnson's shop would now be considered more interesting than Waugh's ; it had a large and venerable stock of penny chap-books (which Miss Mildstone shudderingly believed to be so named in allusion to a slang word for young men), and these "penny-books," as I always called them when I asked for one, were illustrated by quaint wood-cuts. There was, too, a large box of old second-hand novels—Richardson, Smollett, Fielding, Miss Burney, Miss Edgeworth, and such like ; out of it I bought *Caleb Williams*, which I thought then, and think still, to be as dull as it is dismal and inhuman. So far as could be perceived, Johnson's never got in any new stock except the annual show of Valentines and Christmas cards, and even these would contain a great many more old friends than new arrivals.

Waugh's also sold Valentines, but of a different type—silver embossed designs of flowers and bouquets raised on paper springs, with a central motto underneath, and little shiny cupids or doves (with envelopes in their beaks) at each corner. These were scented, and were fitted into flat cardboard boxes which always succumbed in the post. Miss Mildstone would not



have resented the receipt of one of these, but she rarely if ever had the opportunity. When we went to Gracechurch she had ceased to be remembered by genteel swains who despatched Valentines, with their reversed initials pencilled on the back. Not that Miss Mildstone was old, but she was signed with the seal of spinsterhood from her birth, and was wrong to go against her predestination by ultimately marrying a cousin, who knew of her five thousand pounds, and devoted his wedded life to shouting at her and calling her Mary Anne, whereas she had always insisted on being addressed as Marian.

At Waugh's there was a lending library, out of which a book was occasionally taken, and retained for, say, six months. For, though we all confessed to being great readers at Gracechurch, no one had time for much reading. As no one ever did anything in particular, I suppose it was for the same reason. At Waugh's, however, there was a shelf of poets—Wordsworth in red and gold, Longfellow in green and gold (I have the Longfellow now), Mrs. Hemans in brown and gold, Byron in purple and gold, all at three-and-six: and now and then one of these was bought for a birthday or Christmas present, but not often enough to justify Mr. Waugh in supplying the empty space by a new volume; we never dreamt of giving sweets or flowers for presents; what was the good? People had their own gardens, and you might as well have given them a cauliflower; and sweets would be eaten up in a day or two, and leave no monument of your generosity but the box.

A present we looked upon as a permanent investment to repose ever afterward on the central table, one of the spokes of a wheel whose centre was a group of wax flowers under a glass dome. We all knew exactly what presents each of us had received throughout our lives.

There were two milliners also—Mrs. Pay (who made you do it) and Miss Dovey, who fetched her “fashions” from Rentminster and did not need to charge each customer with the expenses of an annual trip to London. Miss Dovey adorned the heads of the farmers’ wives and daughters with striking bonnets; but to be genteel your bonnet must have been devised by Mrs. Pay, whose taste was merely flamboyant. Both ladies had slight beards. Mr. Pay was a very gentlemanlike man, with distinguished legs, and a Napoleonic waxed moustache. As Mr. Grass, the drawing-master, wore an Imperial, you might have thought they were related, but the fact was never established. Such a connection, if proved, would hardly have been deemed derogatory to the latter gentleman, for Mr. Pay (though of course not genteel in our sense), occupied a position almost of his own, quite distinct from that of a tradesman, for he collected rents for a few small landlords, and was registrar of births and deaths. No doubt he registered marriages too, but not in our class, for the genteel had mostly the angelic quality of neither marrying nor being given in marriage.

We had two pastry cooks, or confectioners as we called them. Mrs. Maxwell, at the corner of Water-

gate, whose wares seemed nearly as unchangeable as Waugh's and Johnson's ; and Jefferies, who baked new buns and tea-cakes every day and carried them round, from door to door, all afternoon, in two huge baskets, like little shops. As he left each house for another he rang a doleful bell that used to remind me of the dead-man's in the London Plague, as if he were calling on us to bring out our dead. But we only brought out our plates for "light cakes," a spongy sort of disc with a smooth surface underneath, and honeycombed atop with deep holes subsequently oozy with hot butter.

No self-respecting Gracechurchman, or woman, ever sat down to tea without light-cakes. Tea was in the dining-room, and was a meal, deliberate and quasi-solid, eaten round the big table, on which, later on, supper would be spread. Callers were not offered tea, but cake and wine, and no one affected to "dine late," except the two doctors, who did so not cheerfully but of necessity, and not out of ambition, but because at "dinner-time" they would be far afield in their gigs, driving from one rich farm-house to another, and conveying the bottles of medicine they had made up themselves. We had two chemists also (druggists was our word), who did not make up prescriptions, but sold rat-poison, and tooth-brushes, cattle-medicines, feeding-bottles, lavender-water, and "cough-lozengers," as the ungentleels pronounced them. One druggist would really have been enough, but we liked two of everything, lest absence of competition should cause us to be imposed upon. One of the druggists

drank, to pass the time away, as did one of the book-sellers, and one of the milliners complained how our air reddened the complexion. Neither of the doctors drank, of course, but divided the business between them, and had a common appreciation of good liquor. There were two attorneys, one of whom not only drank, but had *delirium tremens* from time to time, and ultimately hanged himself; after that his rival had all the business, for those who had previously sought their legal advice from the suicide had uneasy qualms as to what had come of it, and would risk no further complicity.

The remaining lawyer, for we thought the word had a finer sound than attorney or solicitor, was thoroughly genteel, which poor Lawyer Squirt had never been—it might have restrained him from so ill-bred an act as hanging himself. Lawyer Gingham had family portraits in his dining-room, and was related by the mother's side to an historian well known to thousands who never heard of Gracechurch. Mr. Gingham was, in fact, a gentleman, and Mrs. Gingham was, being rather less "well-connected," uncompromisingly genteel. So were the four Miss Ginghams. All our young ladies formed quartettes.

There were four Miss Windsors, four Miss Gibbs, four Miss Shrimptons, four Miss Trees, and four Miss Fostons. Unfortunately their mammas had been much less lavish in presenting their husbands with sons. There was only one young Mr. Windsor, two Mr. Gibbs (who both left Gracechurch early in youth and never returned, so that there might just

as well have been none); there were three Mr. Shrimptons, but only the elderly eldest (with a hump) remained at home; there was no Mr. Tree, senior or junior, and the Foston young man was so small and weazened and swamped by large prancing sisters that one seldom remembered him.

If half a dozen families with four sons apiece and no daughters had settled in the town it would have been an act of poetic justice, but nothing of the kind happened. So Mr. Pay had little to do in the matter of registering marriages in the genteel circles of Gracechurch during the fifteen years I lived there.

The four Miss Windsors, the four Miss Gibbs, the four Miss Shrimptons, the four Miss Trees, and the four Miss Fostons were all there when we arrived, and they were all there when we left—young ladies when we first saw them, young ladies still when we said good-bye. Fifteen years made very little difference in the age of a young lady at Gracechurch.

Allusion has been made to the genteel circles of the town, for there were several, intersecting but by no means coinciding. High over all was, of course, Lord Gracechurch, but so high that he was mostly out of sight. Besides the huge estate there he had two others, and on each of those others was a princely mansion. But Gracechurch Hall was burnt down in George IV's time and had never been rebuilt, probably because the Marquess found two big houses enough for him. So he seldom visited his lieges at Gracechurch, and was represented by a viceroy, a cousin of his own, who acted as agent, and reflected his brilliance like a moon.

As one entered the town by the Rentminster road, on one side was the lake, three miles round; for half a mile on the other side were the gardens of Gracechurch House, and finally Gracechurch House itself. It was a long, miscellaneous, red-brick building, or rather accretion of buildings, rather like a short street, facing down the garden and resolutely turning its superior back on the town.

A good many windows, indeed, looked townwards, but none of consequence—the schoolroom, the house-keeper's room, the German governess's bedchamber, the gun-room, the butler's pantry, and all the servants' bedrooms.

Gracechurch House was the highest visible zone of our society, for Lord Gracechurch, as we have explained, soared aloft in the empyrean beyond range of our vision.

Even Gracechurch House was more regal than vice-regal, for Colonel Grace was not only agent but heir-presumptive, his grandfather, Lord Peregrine, having been grand-uncle to his present lordship, who was childless after years of marriage, and the late Marquess had had no brothers. True, Colonel Grace was elderly, and the reigning peer still young, but it was always pleasantly felt at Gracechurch that Master Peregrine, who had been born among us, was destined to wear a coronet.

The Grace family were far from haughty, and knew every soul in the place by sight and name: but so the Almighty does the stars. No one mistook the friendly interest of Gracechurch House for ordinary



friendship. One may speak of having the honour of being known to the Sovereign, but only an ill-bred subject pretends to "know his Majesty."

Next, geographically, to Gracechurch House came Church Street, but only in order of local proximity. No circle was really next to it. The planes were different. Gracechurch House belonged to the county, and breathed the high serene of Rentshire. All other circles were merely of the town.

To most foreigners this English peculiarity is simply incomprehensible : because no other country has precisely our middle class.

There were goodish houses dotted about in other streets, at the top of St. John's Hill, for instance, and at the beginning of Grace Street, by which one entered the town from the Oxminster Road, but the most genteel were Church Street and Pimpley. (Lord Gracechurch's eldest son, if he had existed, would have been Lord Pimpley.)

Church Street had only one side to it for half its length, the church and churchyard taking up the other half. Opposite were the best houses—where lived the four Miss Gibbs, in what would have been No. 1 if we had condescended to numbering our dwellings, which we didn't : no house was numbered, and no house sank to the indignity of labelling itself with its name on gate or gate-post. Next to the Miss Gibbs came Mrs. Jakin, widow of a prehistoric agent of long before Colonel Grace's time. Mrs. Jakin was old enough to remember George III going mad, and had never given in to the foolish fashion

of a crinoline. When we went to Gracechurch several ladies were still wearing out theirs. Mrs. Jakin was a pretty old lady, with a rather positive manner and decisive eyes: she was usually to be seen in her drawing-room window "reading," *i.e.* sharply taking note of who went by. Her windows had a hardish look like her eyes: and, inside, her house had a cool, shady primness and propriety. Long ago she had lived in Gracechurch House, but though agent, her husband had been no relation of my lord's, and the house had then been about a quarter of its present size; altogether overgrown she now considered it. Mrs. Jakin was inclined to politics, and had her eye, not unsuspiciously, on Dizzy.

Next door was a house almost exactly like, but really smaller, which was the town residence of Miss Broom: who, however, chiefly lived "out of town" with her sister, Mrs. Darrell, and her brother-in-law, Mr. Darrell, at Overton Lodge. In her drawing-room Miss Broom had a hearth-rug with a life-sized lion worked on it in raised worsted work, which caused me to believe she must be incalculably wealthy. When you (I) went to call she would casually inquire if you (I) were partial to ginger-nuts, and ten minutes later would produce a supply out of a glass cupboard in which you had seen them all along. There was a very large crystal goblet in the cupboard out of which Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton had once drunk bottled stout (it would have held two bottles easily).

"They called," Miss Broom would remark in her

disengaged manner, "on papa and happened to be thirsty."

"Was Lord Nelson her father?"

"No, my dear, I believe not. They were merely acquaintances."

Dr. Hart was Miss Broom's neighbour on the side remote from Mrs. Jakin, a clever, sardonic man, with a bitter tongue and a hard head, but a most kindly heart. He was always buying fine new furniture, so that, as the rooms were quite small, you could never do anything but sit still in them as though you had been packed up.

Dr. Hart was a bachelor, past his youth, but he had been engaged to marry pretty Lettice Thorn, who died about a week before the date fixed for their wedding.

And that, at last, brings us to Thorn Croft and Miss Fish.

The Thorns who made their home at Thorn Croft might, if they had chosen, have lived upon a good enough estate of their own, twenty miles from Gracechurch, in South Rentshire. But for several generations they had been content to go there now and then for shooting in autumn and winter, or in spring for the Lady Day rent-audit. Probably they were not big enough for their county neighbours, for Rentshire squires are magnates, with twenty and thirty thousand a year. Anyway, the Thorns stuck to Gracechurch and made no effort to pose as county folk. Nevertheless, they had fifteen hundred a year or more from land, and "held themselves up" after a fashion.

About thirty years before we went to Gracechurch, old Abel Thorn died and left two children, Kezia, who was fully grown up, and Fernando, a year or so younger—godson of Sir Fernando Wilkes, a hunting friend of Abel's, and some sort of far-away connection.

Mrs. Thorn was already dead, so the young people were quite alone. But Kezia was by no means afraid of doing the honours as mistress of the house, and made up her mind to be mistress altogether: for Fernando was barely of age, and young in manners and ideas, of an easy, pliant disposition, not nearly so clever and capable as his sister, on whom he leaned, and in whom (as she took for granted) he confided all his secrets. Old Abel had been "close" in money matters, and Fernando had never had any regular allowance. So he naturally made some unambitious debts, which Kezia paid for him, for she had her own income, having inherited their mother's fortune. She gave the money, and what was more kept her counsel, knowing very well that if she had split on him the old gentleman, who had everything in his own hands, would have left at least half of what he had away from a spendthrift, careless son to his prudent, careful daughter. Poor Fernando knew this too, and was thoroughly grateful, especially as his sister scolded him very little, and indeed blamed their father for keeping him "so tight."

"It's worrying having to ask for every guinea you want," she admitted, "and he roars at you when you do ask. I know he does at me when I go for the

money for the house-books: though he expects a good table, and asks people in without a word of warning, so that one must have something extra in the larder to fall back on."

But Kezia did not really mind being roared at, and had not the least idea of paying house-books out of her own pocket.

So Fernando was grateful, and Kezia depended on his confiding in her. But Fernando was rather weak, and only told his secrets when he could not help it. Now that he was of age, and had twice his sister's income, he kept his own secrets. Having lost no time in repaying his debt to her he considered the gratitude cancelled also.

And he fell in love. Not for one moment did he imagine that any confidence would have made his sister approve of his choice, for he was shrewd in his way, and knew, as he told himself, the measure of Kezia's foot precisely.

Miss Thorn was ambitious for her family, and was keen to see its pretensions more firmly enforced. The estate in South Rentshire had belonged to them for nearly two centuries; why should they live among farmers and have only the retired farmers of Gracechurch for friends? Fernando was good-looking, so was she: they both had some education and better manners than their neighbours; it behoved them to marry advantageously. For her own part Kezia was in no hurry to marry at all. But at school she had known rather well a certain Angela Pratt, who was niece to a baronet, and not penniless either; so she

invited Miss Pratt to Thorn Croft (at a season when the Grace family were away in London), and sang her praises to Fernando, and Fernando's to Angela.

Angela may have listened, but Fernando was readier to perceive a slight cast in Miss Pratt's left eye than to remember that Sir Welbore Pratt, of Prattle Magna, was her uncle. He said nothing about the oblique eye to his sister, and was properly civil to her friend, but his own two eyes had lighted on Sal Fish.

Her real name was Sarah Perch, but Kezia knew her well by sight, and invented the doubly-appropriate nickname—for Sarah sold fish about the streets, calling out "Fresh salmon, ma'am, and trout," in a voice that was rich and musical enough, if only Miss Thorn had chosen to note it.

She noted nothing of the kind, nor that Sal had large and lustrous dark eyes (Fernando was almost effeminately fair) as liquid as her voice. Miss Thorn was not disposed to recognise beauty in creatures of that sort.

But Sal's eyes were not only black and shining. They were modest, too, and withal prudent and circumspect. If young Thorn looked at her, she was not afraid to look at him, but there was that in her glance that warned him to be respectful. He took the warning, perhaps he never needed it, and was so respectful that one day Sally Perch found him asking her to be Mrs. Thorn. Why should she object? The lad was a good lad, and comely, for all his girlish fairness; he, too, had a voice of rich tone, unlike his sister's over-metallic hard treble; he was a proper,



tall fellow; manly enough in build, and he was earnest and straightforward. He had not the least desire to be a country gentleman, but wanted very much to be happy, and Sally thought she could make him so. If he had a property and a large income it was not his fault, and need not be her misfortune. She did not snap him up at his first offer; but, when he had repeated it often enough to prove his seriousness, she said, "I don't mind. But you'll have Queen Elizabeth to reckon with."

Miss Thorn, we know, was named Kezia, but her future sister-in-law was not the only person who likened her to the masterful Tudor princess.

Fernando shook in his shoes: but he was going to have his own way, and was not, after all, quite so young as when he had borrowed his sister's money.

"I paid her back, the first money I had," he told his betrothed. "If she meant to buy me, I didn't mean to sell myself."

"Well, there'll be squalls. But they won't hurt me if they don't hurt you. But don't deceive yourself into thinking she'll ever make the best of me, or make it up with you."

Fernando remembered his sister's thin lips and stone-grey eyes and heaved a sigh; but he was not equal to thinking of two things at once, and at present he was only anxious to think of Sally.

"You never know," he declared with shallow hopefulness. "She has no one but me, and she's fond of me too. Would next month do?"

Angela Pratt had come for six weeks, and she had stayed two months : her mother had no objection to her extending her visit still further, and Kezia was as hospitable and sanguine as ever. But her friend meekly persisted in now going home.

"Well, if Fernando can't persuade you, I can't," said Kezia.

Angela sighed inwardly, knowing that Master Fernando had tried very little persuasion.

"He'll miss you when you're gone," his sister declared. "He says you're as good as gold."

"Would it be inconvenient to send me to the coach on Thursday : if you're not using the horses ? Papa will be at Rentminster on Thursday, and it's only an hour and a half in the coach from the cross-roads."

"It's never convenient to me to send my friends away," Miss Thorn politely averred, "but of course you can have the horses, if go you must. Only you must come back in August : you shall walk with me in the Ladies' club, and I'll dress your pole. Mine was the prettiest last year."

So on Thursday the horses took Angela to Rugton cross-roads to meet the coach, and Fernando very civilly offered to see her so far on her way. There would have been room for Kezia, too, but she diplomatically excused herself and stayed at home to try on a new gown and "make up her books."

When the chariot returned, the coachman sent in word that Mr. Thorn had gone on to Rentminster, and wouldn't be back till to-morrow. Kezia was surprised : was he really more sly than she had given him credit

for, and had he been more willing to flirt with her friend when she was not standing over them ?

Kezia drank tea with Mrs. Windsor over the way, and praised her brother and her friend, who, as Mrs. Windsor and all the four Miss Windsors knew, was own niece to Sir Welbore Pratt, of Prattle Magna.

Thorn Croft is just at the edge of the town, and stands in large, old-fashioned gardens. Over the road is a house of much the same size, but grey and gaunt, whereas Thorn Croft is a mellow, ruddy building of Queen Anne's time. The Windsors held themselves equal to the Thorns, for they owned their big farm out in the country, and had another house there, better than Stone Lodge—but they preferred living in Gracechurch where they could see more company ; and young Windsor, who may have liked bachelor freedom, was well content that his mother and sisters should not always be tied to his coat-tails. The Windsors were much fonder of Fernando than of his sister, whom they called "high and upsettin' ;" but Kezia did not desire their fondness for herself, and was resolute to defend her brother from too much of it.

When Miss Thorn was gone, Mrs. Windsor shook her brown curls much as a spaniel does when he gets out of the water.

"She wants us to think it'll be a match," she said warmly, "but don't tell me ! Fernando don't care for baronets, squint or no squint."

"Ma !" expostulated her daughter Rachel, "no one says 'squint' now: it's only a *cast* the poor thing has."

B

"Cast indeed!" bristled her mother. "Let 'em cast as they like, it's a fly as Nandy Thorn won't rise to. Call me a liar else."

Rachel wished her mamma would not be vulgar: but Mrs. Windsor did not mind being vulgar. What she hated was to be imposed on.

"Only it'd take three Kezia Thorns to do it," she protested.

Kezia went serenely home; and serenely plumed herself on having dashed any matrimonial hopes the Windsor family might have conceived.

"All said and done they're only gentlemen farmers," she considered, whereas the Thorns, though owning land, had never farmed it.

Next morning Kezia attended to her household duties, and proceeded to dust the drawing-room. It was a pretty room, with a quantity of fine old china, too precious to trust to a maid's heavy hands. Though she did not know it, Mrs. Windsor was again talking of her over the way.

"Whether that silly Billy lets himself be dragooned into marrying that squint-eyed baronet or no——" she was saying.

"Mamma, baronets don't go in the female line," urged Rachel, "and anyway, Miss Pratt is only Sir Welbore's niece——"

"Very well. If he likes to marry in the female line let him. Only don't any of *you* think of him! His mother died in a madhouse: and none o' *my* grandchildren shall be lunatics while I can forbid the banns. Nandy's too soft to go crazy; but Kezia's

that tempestuous I shouldn't wonder — for all her sharpness. She plays fine lady and talks pretty, but her temper's beyond anything. When they painted the chariot green as she'd ordered yaller, she fairly frightened the man that took it home. 'Yeller!' he told me. 'She's a yeller, Mum, as you could hear all across the road.' "

"She bit me once when we were playing hare and hounds, years ago," said Carry, the second daughter.

"And it's well you didn't go mad," declared the old lady, emphatically.

But Kezia, in dignified unconsciousness, did not even feel her left ear burning, and dusted the china figures daintily.

She had just finished, when the sound of footsteps on the gravel caught her always alert attention, and she stepped to a front window to see who could be calling at so ungentle an hour.

There was Fernando, very spruce, with a flower in his buttonhole and white gloves on his hands: "Sal Fish" leaning on his arm, in a decent pale silk gown, a white lace bonnet, and gloves of the same fateful colour. The bride's expression was not meek, though quiet and self-possessed, and her eye met Kezia's without quailing, which was, perhaps, more than could be said for Fernando's.

But he coughed, nervously it must be said, and drew his wife quickly to the hall-door, which stood open, and brought her straight into the room.

Sally dropped a curtsey, not really defiantly, though

Kezia took it so, and withdrew her arm from her husband's.

"Tell your sister," she said, firmly.

"We were married in Rentminster yesterday," he explained, standing for a moment, it must be confessed, on one leg, and smiling rather feebly.

"It's a lie!" screamed Kezia, a blinding scarlet flush covering her thin face to the eyes and over.

"Nay, Miss Thorn, it's no lie," said her sister-in-law.

"You say so!" shrieked Kezia, "then you're a liar too!"

"Come!" said Fernando, standing square enough on both his feet, and reddening too, "call me what you like; but keep your tongue off my wife. She's your sister, and if my father was alive, she'd be his daughter."

"If father was alive you'd never have dared—coward!" his sister literally shouted.

To do him justice, Fernando did not look cowardly.

"Abuse me up hill and down dale," he said, "but all the abuse in the world won't alter it. We're married. And we're come home to live. Live here too and welcome. But stop making a noise, and hold your tongue off Sally."

Kezia stood for one moment rigid, and then, with a quick twist upon her feet she turned hither and thither about the room, and dashed, with sweep after sweep of her furious arm, all the pretty and precious china off tables, and cabinets, and chimney-piece, to the floor, till it was littered with worthless fragments.

Young Mrs. Thorn watched her with a queer look, more than half compassionate, almost half compunctious, for she, too, knew of the taint of madness in her husband's blood and his sister's. Fernando from red grew pale; but it was the paleness of anger. He did not know that his mother and Kezia's had died mad: he thought it all sheer wicked passion and temper.

Kezia was never wholly sane again. She never was shut up—thanks to her sister-in-law, who would not hear of it. But for a time she needed restraint at home. And her wits ever after were unhinged. All the same she married—what is more, she eloped—five years later, with a man younger than herself who was very innocent of baronets in his pedigree, which began with his father, an attorney of Rentminster. He was not over handsome, but he had a smooth and oily tongue, and succeeded in cajoling Miss Thorn into believing that her eight hundred a year was safer in his keeping than it would be if she left herself in her brother's hands. He gave her to understand, also, that Fernando called her an old maid—and she but eight-and-twenty, and took it for granted that she would never marry, but be content to play maiden aunt to his little Nandy and Lettice. Kezia's money was all at her own disposal, and she and Mr. Sellar bought Kimhill, which came just then into the market: a small new country house with some goodish rooms and a magnificent view. Mr. Kim, who built it, had lately died insolvent, and they took



over furniture and all. On taking up her residence there, Mrs. Sellar received three or four large cases by the carrier, addressed in her sister-in-law's handwriting, with compliments and best wishes. They contained all the fragments of the china Kezia had smashed five years before : and report maintained that she spent the rest of her life sorting and piecing them together.

No doubt young Mrs. Thorn and Kezia always hated each other. But Sal Fish had sanity and reasonable conduct on her side, and got altogether the best of it. Everyone in Gracechurch knew she had cried fish in the streets, and everyone respected her. She made a man of her husband, and his home was thoroughly happy.

But he died a few years before we went to Gracechurch, and his daughter survived him less than twelve months. Young Nandy was dying too when we first knew him, and then his mother was left alone.

When I went to call (mostly to thank for some kind present) I would sit on a square stool by the fire ; and the mark of my small head, where it leant against the wall, is still there, they tell me, after nine-and-forty years—for I was but six years old then.

Presently Mrs. Sellar would be announced, nearer sixty than fifty now, and would sail in, with a monstrous show of cordiality, all smiles and bowings and scrapings, as mad as a March hare, and be received with a bristly politeness.

Sal Fish was never glad to see her, and would not pretend to be. What even a child could see was that Kezia was frightened of her.

She would sit, very finely dressed, mopping and mowing, winking at the fire, and sometimes at me, pretending to be inwardly diverted by her homely sister-in-law. Presently the homely sister-in-law would turn coolly to look at her, without interrupting her knitting, but with a full turn of her body in her chair, as she would say :

“ Fidgety to-day ! Full moon maybe.”

And Kezia would collapse.

## CHAPTER II

### COUNTING HANDKERCHIEFS

OUR own removal to Gracechurch, in the summer of 1864, was due to the fame of a school kept there by the Rector, a Rev. John Knight, which had penetrated as far as the little Welsh town on the river Dee where we had lived for the few years of my life preceding the above-mentioned date. Our widowed mother, with three boys to bring up, was very poor, and it was in the hope of being able to educate them well and cheaply that she made the move.

The journey to Gracechurch was my first experience of railway-travelling, and I liked it as I have liked every other journey by train I have made since. About a year before I had seen the first train arrive at Llandinas. My nurse, with whom I had had a difference of opinion, stated that it came to convey into ignominious exile little boys who were troublesome. Oblivious of this dismal menace I darted away from her along a walk newly laid with deep and sharp gravel, but returned to demand explanation of a youth extraordinarily pitted with small-pox. "Ah!" I was informed, "he ran away from his nurse when he were little and fell on the gravel, and the stones stuck in his face and made him like that."

When we arrived at Gracechurch we found that the man on whose account we had come had just died, and every arch and pillar in the great parish church was draped in black cloth. This sombre opulence gave me a rich idea of our new town which was justified in so far as almost everybody in it was better off than we were.

The late Rector's boarding-scholars had all gone back to their homes, but the school for "day-boys" survived under the former usher, an aquiline but apologetic sort of young man, who could not forget that his mother kept a grocery-shop in Church Street. There I laid out my few pennies in the purchase of triangular segments of a leathery compound locally esteemed as Mrs. Jackson's raisin-cake. As the whole cake (which filled a kitchen-plate seamed with oven-cracks) might contain two dozen raisins, and cut up into fifteen slices at a penny each, it is probable that the schoolmaster's mother derived a profit. The schoolmaster himself never rose to be more than "Jacky Jackson" with his pupils, and was unable to persuade even himself that they obeyed him. My eldest brother at once went to the school, and later on I did so : but my stay was short, for in my second week I was ordered out for a caning, because of my inability to give the Latin for "O Table," and my argument that the Romans would never have been foolish enough to converse with their furniture.

"Stand out !" quavered Jacky Jackson in a voice of tremulous authority.

"What for ?" demanded his eight-year-old pupil.

"You'll see when you come," squeaked Jacky, fingering his cane and blushing, while the boys tittered.

And out I went—through the door which stood invitingly open, and gave prospects of leafy June more tempting than that of the nervously irate schoolmaster with his waving cane. I walked out and walked home; and my mother, who was obviously a weak person, never made me walk back again.

When we first came to Gracechurch we had lodgings in the Watergate, a cheap street of cottages and small shops, where, however, was one big house. It was a gaunt, blind-looking residence, built of dull brick, much the colour of raw beetroot. The sun never tried to shine on to it, and could not have shone into it if he had tried, for the three Miss Pughs would have dreaded his fading the carpets. One Miss Pugh came to call, and apologised for doing so on the ground that our mother was "an authoress, ma'am." That was the eldest and least parchmental of the sisters, who may, very likely, have been a pretty girl once. To me it did not then occur that people's ages were subject to vicissitude, or that elderly persons had not started with the plainness successfully achieved by fifty or sixty years of dull and meaningless life. When we returned the visit another Miss Pugh, Caroline, opened the uncompromising-looking hall-door, which was covered with fat pimples I longed to crack. Miss Caroline was perhaps the worse of some five-and-fifty summers, and her sister spoke of her as a girl. There was to be a coming-of-age ball at Wheatly Park, "the seat," as our hostess explained, "of Mr.

Chichester Wymering," whereat I at once pictured to myself a mansion oddly constructed to simulate a gargantuan armchair. The whole Pugh family was bidden, but only Caroline was to go. "Girls," said her sister, "like gaieties." To the ball Caroline went, in a gown resulting from excavations in the family store-closet, preternaturally garnished with artificial flowers made of worsted.

But Miss Pugh was not only aware that girls like gaieties: little boys of six, she remembered, like apples, and I was promptly provided with some. They were, like their giver, of a bilious complexion, but much better than their appearance.

"Put the others in your pocket," suggested Mr. Pugh, who had vaguely supervened in an overcoat—the day was sultry—and a worsted comforter, and been introduced as "Our brother, poor thing; a widower, ma'am."

I surveyed him with interest, for I had only heard of widows till then, and supposed him to be more, since the comparative degree was necessary to describe him. No doubt he had, in the local phrase, "buried two wives," and I could not but wonder what the two ladies had been like who had given him the opportunity. He was of a drab colour, and contrived to have no expression whatever, his face being like the front door, and as lumpy as it was.

"Put the others in your pocket, Master John," he repeated.

But I was incapable of so great a solecism in good manners.

"There are plenty more where those came from," Miss Pugh declared encouragingly, "there's a roomful upstairs.

I longed to see that room : I pictured it as large as the gaunt apartment where we were seated, crammed with apples to the ceiling, so that when the door should open they would roll out upon the landing.

"Come and see," said Miss Caroline, who had her own reasons for desiring a brief escape. When she had admitted us her gown was pinned up behind, and all this time she had been ineffectively trying to unpin it unobserved, without a break in the conversation.

I gladly accepted the invitation and followed her up a staircase lighted by a blue window, through which there was an unearthly blue view of the back of Miss Mildstone's house and of that lady's croquet-ground. Miss Caroline herself, being naturally of a lemonish colour, was now as green as a parrot : and a lurid twilight filled the whole place. The Pughs, I felt, were interesting people.

On the landing was a life-size figure of a South Sea islander in the Court dress of his country, whom Miss Caroline briefly introduced to my notice as "a Heathen."

"My papa's brother brought him home," she explained.

I wondered if he had arrived alive, and by what steps he had been rendered fit for stuffing. But, being averse from asking questions, I did not learn that he was made of wood till long afterwards. We went

along a passage at the end of which was the apple-room.

"There !" cried Miss Caroline, unlocking the door.

It was an anti-climax. For nothing rolled out except a sourish smell, and the room was not much more than a closet, on the floor of which a thin layer of apples was spread on hay of the same colour as Miss Caroline's hair—it would not have been hard to believe she had strewn the place with her own locks, which would have accounted for the scantiness of those she retained for personal use. The flatness of the apple-room episode made the stuffed Indian only the more exciting. Even the widower, poor thing, downstairs, was interesting when regarded as the nephew of a pirate addicted to cannibalism. At Llandinas there had been no neighbours of piratical descent.

As we crossed the landing on our way downstairs I was struck by the number of doors that opened from it—not that they looked as if they ever *were* opened. Just as I decided that they never were, one was noiselessly, even stealthily drawn ajar from within and a lean face peered out. The afternoon sun blazing through the window on the stairs made it quite sky-blue.

The face belonged to some one considerably older than Miss Caroline, and was, I had little doubt, that of the pirate's widow.

The door closed again promptly and we went downstairs.

We found Mr. Pugh as we had left him, plaiting the



fringe of his worsted comforter and listening to his sister and my mother.

"And what, if not too inquisitive, might be the name of the novel you have written, ma'am?" Miss Pugh was inquiring.

She held the mouthpiece of my mother's speaking-trumpet as though it had been a goblet, and quaffed, as it were, gulps from it every time she spoke.

"*Araki the Daimio*," replied my mother.

"A foreign title," explained Miss Pugh to the widower, with quite the air of a linguist.

"Japanese," said my mother.

"Would it be *in* Japanese?" asked Miss Pugh, with a pull at the goblet that left her almost hissing with breathlessness.

I think that both Miss Pughs were disappointed to find the novel was in the vulgar tongue. Mr. Pugh's face could express disappointment as little as it could express anything else; but he sucked the plait he had made in the fringe of his comforter and changed his legs, carefully pulling up his trousers to prevent creases at the knees.

I was wondering if the big, grim room, brown and utterly uninhabitable, were drawing-room or dining-room. There was a huge dinner-table, without any cloth, and a large sideboard: there were twelve massive chairs and two hard armchairs, of a bony build suggestive of a dining-room. But there were wax-flowers under a glass shade between the lace window-curtains, and there were pale-pink "lustres" on the chimney-piece which would have jingled delightfully if a little

boy might have shaken them. There was a large framed picture, wrought in worsted-work, representing Jonas, reclining on the sea-shore in an attitude of surprise, while the whale, evidently fatigued by his recent efforts to restore the prophet to society, was resting on a neighbouring sand-bank and regarding his late guest with one suspicious eye. Over the sideboard was a row of silhouettes so glaringly like the Pugh family as to establish the fact of their having profiles.

When we got home our landlady came in to congratulate us upon the acquaintance. Mr. Pugh, she averred, was an independent gentleman, and the Miss Pughs were independent ladies : as there was a hard-featured Independent chapel nearly opposite, I instantly concluded that Mrs. Hornskull alluded to their religious proclivities. In reality she implied that they "had no call" to work for their living.

"What *do* they do?" inquired my mother.

"Well, I suppose Miss Pugh does the cookin' of mornin's, and walks out along with Mr. Pugh of afternoons ; and Miss Caroline does the house and that : for, though independent, they keep no girl. Miss Jemima counts her 'ankerchers."

I pictured many thousands of handkerchiefs, bales of them, in fact ; with Miss Jemima perpetually engaged in trying to make the sum-total the same after each counting, and perpetually failing.

"Counts her handkerchiefs?" exclaimed my mother.

Mrs. Hornskull nodded impressively, and removed the mouth-piece of the speaking-trumpet to cough behind it rhetorically.

"Yes'm. She counts her 'ankerchers. Week in, week out. She don't come downstairs: leastways never to visitors. Some say never at all. Nor she don't let her sisters into her room, let alone the Captain." (The pirate clearly survived! I listened with deeper interest. Doubtless the handkerchiefs were spoils of his nefarious traffic, and the noses to which they should legally have been applied were far beneath the wave.)

"Is Mr. Pugh a captain?" asked my mother.

"He were, ma'am. In the Cavalry." (At Gracechurch "the Cavalry" meant the North Rentshire Yeomanry.) "In his younger days 'fore he took his lady, Miss Wagfin as was, as saw him first on the *Red Lion* fly-horse in his blue uniform. He was reckoned a fine young man."

I remembered his care to avoid creases in his dingy brown trousers, and felt sure he had not forgotten it.

"Some say the Captain never sees Miss Jemima," Mrs. Hornskull continued. "Her meals is left by her door on a tray, and she takes them in unbeknownst like. She had a disappointment, that's for why she counts her 'ankerchers."

In looking back at the vista of half a dozen years I too was conscious of having had disappointments. Would it have relieved them to tell over my handkerchiefs?—but, without counting, I knew there were eleven, for I had given one to a traveller of engaging manners in exchange for a balloon, on which my nurse sat down and sustained a "turn," under the

temporary impression that it was the cat, and the explosion an expression of pussy's annoyance. There could be no distraction from grief in counting when you knew the total beforehand.

Miss Jemima Pugh, it appeared, had once been young, and, Mrs. Hornskull declared, "pretty too, when dressed." She went to Graceminster on a visit and saw Sir Watkin Wynn there, and also the performing seals. (My mother had a number on letters and it was my instant resolve to see if they would perform.) What was more to the point a young man saw her, and he travelled, said our landlady, in umbrellas. By this singular mode of progression, which on the morrow I endeavoured to imitate in vain, perhaps because I had but one, whereas he must have had a quantity, Mr. Gringer had arrived at Graceminster : and, being struck by Miss Jemima's 'air (to this day I have never been able to decide whether it was her locks or her mien that impressed him), he sought and obtained an introduction, at a flower-show. They met again and yet again, and finally Miss Jemima consented to change the name of Pugh for that of Gringer. She came home to Watergate House in all the triumph of betrothal, and set about getting together her wedding clothes, or Crusoe, as Mrs. Hornskull put it. This word set me on scruples, for it suggested the possibility of the piratical uncle's having been merely engaged in the same line of life as the celebrated Robinson.

The wedding-gown came home (as though it had been away on a visit), the wedding-veil came home,

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the linen had all been bought, and only the handkerchiefs—put out to mark “with her noo aneeshals,” said Mrs. Hornskull, “‘J. G.’: so flowered you’d scarce know what letters they stood for”—were still awaited breathlessly, when, on the day but one before that which was to make Mr. Gringer the happiest of men, as so many have been made before him, a seedy female knocked at the door of Watergate House. Jemima heard the knock and ran to the door herself.

“‘It’s Jane Braid with the ‘ankerchers,’ she called out to Miss Pugh over the banisters. ‘Don’t you mind leaving the cookin’;’ for Miss Pugh was up to her eyes in jellies and that; and the charwoman (as told me and heard it all) was scaldin’ out a saucepan and not able to run to the door. So Miss Jemima, all in papers, for her ‘air never curled naturally, went to the door, and there sure enough was Jane Braid with the ‘ankerchers, just come up, and short o’ breath to show she’d not delayed any: and Miss Jemima held out her hand for the parcel, all the quicker because there was another woman on the doorstep, a stranger in a shabby shawl.

“‘Are you Miss Pugh?’ arst the woman in a sulky, whiny voice, that was uppish too.

“‘I’m Miss Jemima Pugh,’ said Miss Jemima, all in a tremble and no more knowin’ why than a savage. It was half temper, too, for she was cross at being caught in papers by a stranger, and the woman spoke fierce-like.

“‘And which Miss Pugh’s going to get married?’ arst the stranger.

“ ‘Well, it’s me, since you want to know,’ said Miss Jemima, speakin’ all the more sharp because she knew she was upset. ‘Not that I see what it matters to you,’ she ended with a toss and a gulp like.

“ ‘Let me step in,’ said the woman, ‘and I’ll show whether it matters to me or no. Or I’ll tell you here on the step if you’d rather.’

“ ‘Don’t let her in,’ said Jane Braid, ‘if she’s aught to say, let her say it out, miss.’

“ ‘Step in,’ said Miss Jemima, not to Jane Braid ; and she held the door open enough for the woman to walk in, then shut it after her close and tight.

“ ‘They went into the big room on the left as you go in—it was the parlour then, but none of ’em ever sits in it since.

“ ‘My name’s Eliza Gringer,’ said the woman.

“ ‘A poor relation of Mr. Samuel Gringer, perhaps,’ said Miss Jemima, hard enough, but tremblin’ still.

“ ‘Poor I am,’ said the woman, ‘as my rags of clothes tell you. And near enough relation to Mr. Samuel Gringer as you call him. I’m his wife, miss !’

“ ‘It turned out true, too. The woman *was* his wife, tho’ a drunkard and a vilent temper. And he’d given a lawyer two guineas for a paper that was to be a divorce, like. But the paper wasn’t worth two shillings, and they were man and wife still ; only he thought he’d give her the slip, and heard nought of her for four year’ and better. . . . Miss Jemima, she skrieked out and ran upstairs clutching the parcel of ’ankerchers, best lawn and four dozen on ’em ; some

say ten dozen. She tore open the packet and set to countin' of 'em : skrikin' and laughin' all the while. And she's gone on countin' them ever since—and that's five and twenty year', for it was the year I married Ornskull, and I've had seven and buried four on 'em. What eyes that child have, ma'am, I doubt it's not 'elthy to have 'em so big and starey like. Well I stepped in to see if you was ready for tea, ma'am ; and it's well as you should know the Miss Pughs are independent ; though they keep no girl, along of Miss Jemima."

## CHAPTER III

### MISS SMOLLETT'S RING

ONE peculiar feature of the country round Gracechurch was that you could hardly take an hour's drive in the neighbourhood without falling in with a bit of Flintshire wandering about of its own accord without the slightest reference to the main bulk of that county. But if you really wanted to go into Wales you had to leave the town by Scotland Street, Grange Road, or Primpley.

Why Scotland Street should have been the beginning of a high road into the Welsh Principality no one ever inquired or explained. On entering Gracechurch that way the first house on one's left was attached to a brewery, of which we had a good many, as was natural, seeing that the tradesmen and farmers were much disposed to retire at about sixty years of age and devote the rest of their time to drinking themselves to death in an unconvivial decorous fashion.

The brewery-house at the entrance of Scotland Street was an uncharacteristic newish building, of whitish brick, with red brick round the window and door frames, which gave it a look of having sore eyes.

A hundred yards beyond it you came to two genteel residences, one of which was of a good size ; the other,



stuck to it like a limpet, was quite small, and turned aside at an angle, as if slightly shocked by its neighbour and anxious to forget its existence.

In this smaller house, which was as spruce and white as a tiny yacht, lived the two Miss Drays. Of course there had been four once, but two had married. The youngest but one of the four was Mrs. Wakefield, a widow with a quiet son who was in process of becoming a clergyman, and apt to come and spend Christmas with his aunts, on which occasions he would read the lessons at church, in a profuse perspiration and a glittering pair of spectacles that reflected all the apostles in the east window. He was a blameless youth, but not entirely approved by Miss Harriet Dray, who suspected him of Puseyite leanings, owing to her having detected him in the act of absent-mindedly turning towards the altar at the "Glory be to the Father" at the end of one of the Psalms. The late Rector, Mr Knight, had also been, if not exactly "high," of an upward tendency, and all the choir and free seats faced eastward during the Creed ; but to turn in the same direction at the *Gloria Patri* was what Miss Harriet could not away with. She was, as she informed her contemporaries with a snort like that of a whale, Protestant to the backbone. If she had said all down her backbone a more extensive idea would have been conveyed, for there was at least a yard of it. Miss Harriet had a large face, large teeth, and black hair and eyes and eyebrows, and a manner that was composed of crinoline and jet bugles. The other married sister, Mrs. Bumpus, resembled her, but with

ameliorations. The arch of her eyebrows was less aggressive, and her lips were thinner and not so frequently employed in loud criticism. Mrs. Bumpus had married well, and there was infinite complacency in the ample folds of her velvet gown. Miss Harriet wore velveteen—with the air of preferring it.

Miss Dray was much the nicest of the four sisters, and not in the least like them, though the other three grew less and less like her till the difference culminated in Miss Harriet, who was the youngest. Miss Dray was plain, but her face was pleasant, and she was clever and well-educated. Her manner was literary, and rather gentlemanly, and her humour had a slightly Rabelaisian flavour. It was supposed that, though she actually spoke English, she might have ordered dinner in Greek or Hebrew had she been so disposed. When these ladies came to call, Miss Harriet's crinoline filled our little parlour, and her voice filled the house, for, though she refused to touch my mother's speaking-trumpet, she bellowed at her across the room, and seemed rather irate at receiving only conjectural smiles in reply. At last she bent the weight of her conversation on me.

"Are you deaf, too, little boy?"

"No. Only mamma," I replied meekly, as one disclaiming distinctions confined to his betters.

"H'm. How old are you?"

"Six."

"Not a bad age of its kind," she admitted with grim concession. "What's your name?"

"John Francis Edward Plantagenet Ayscough."

"Good lord! Who on earth gave you those names?"

"Do you mean," I inquired doubtfully, "'my god-fathers and godmothers in my baptism?'" She did not seem to do her part quite right. "I haven't any. I was going to die, and my father baptized me in the India china pot-pourri bowl."

"Was your father a clergyman?"

"Yes."

"I wonder you didn't die while he was spoutin' out all those names. Can you read?"

"Not well. I'm delicate——"

"You should do everything well that you do at all. There's nothing indelicate in reading."

"Depends on the book, Harry," Miss Dray interjected from the top of the trumpet.

I liked Miss Dray best, because she did not ask questions, and had not disapproving eyebrows. She did not wear a crinoline, and never had done so, which was supposed to be connected somehow with her ability to converse in dead languages. She wore, however, a good many teeth which she could rattle in her mouth when scoring a conversational point or achieving the climax of an anecdote.

When the ladies were gone, Mrs. Hornskull appeared with the tea-tray, anxious to attach her imprimatur to our visitors.

"Independent ladies, ma'am," she declared, "and deeply respected. Miss Dray taught Sunday-school a many years and never let none of the gals come in crinolines. If they dared to, she just sent 'em

out into the churchyard to take 'em off, behindst a tombstone. Miss Dray's cousin is a magistrate and it's unknown what she gives in charity. I've one of her petticoats on now, and beautiful long flannen. Miss Harriet's the youngest and Madam Dray made up her mind it was to be a boy—having three girls already : she settled it all, how he was to be a colonel of dragoons like her own father."

I could not help thinking Miss Harriet would have done well had she fallen in with these arrangements ; and immediately pictured her as a dragoon officer, mounted on a big horse, eyebrows, crinoline and all. As time went on, my mother and Miss Dray became great friends : I used to sit in her bow-window and look out, while they talked. The old lady was full of anecdote, some of her stories, as I have hinted, having a fruity, after-dinner twang about them. I fancy their big relations also liked her better than Miss Harriet, for she was much oftener invited to Drayton Hall, and had met there all sorts of fine folk, of whom she had many interesting and odd things to tell. She called lords by their names, and could speak of a duke with no more awe than if he had been a Rural Dean—not that she bragged of lords.

"Oh, yes," people would say at Gracechurch. "Miss Dray is *very* well connected"—but no one ever made the same remark in reference to Miss Harriet. Miss Harriet was seldom in when we called, being much addicted to stalking about with a boon companion, of a masculine type like her own, called Miss

Toms of the Square, to distinguish her from another Miss Toms of Willow Lodge.

And now for the larger house to which that of the Miss Drays looked like an appendage or supplement. It was very spick and span, and as white as the deck of a man-of-war : it had a large olive-green front door under a portico, with four Corinthian columns ; those pillars, and a full-sized footman, who was very commonly to be seen standing between them, surveying the street with a languid air of awaiting titled visitors, made Magnolia House seem bigger than it really was.

In Magnolia House lived the Reverend Angus Smollett and his sister, who was unmarried like himself, and had mellowed in the suns of some five-and-forty autumns. Except in her handsome carriage, drawn by a pair of prosperous, shining bay horses, Miss Smollett was not much seen in Gracechurch : for she was an invalid, and had something the matter with her back which made it difficult for her to get in and out of the landau. Nor were the Gracechurch folk very familiar with the inside of Magnolia House. Miss Smollett gave no tea-parties, and accepted invitations to none, which Gracechurch said was due to her back, but resented all the same. Once or so in the winter Mr. Smollett gave a dinner-party, but only gentlemen were bidden, and his sister did not appear. He was never regarded as a Gracechurchman : partly because he showed no desire to be so considered, and partly because he had quarrelled with the Rector. He was incumbent of a scattered, out-lying village called Pentrehiland, close to the Welsh border, but originally

forming part of our huge parish. The Rector had been chiefly instrumental in getting the church built and also in having the Scottish clergyman appointed to the new cure. But, the moment he appeared on the scene, Mr. Smollett began to fight, and to use acidulous gifts of tongue and pen in a manner that set all Gracechurch up in arms. He was flatly Ritualist, and that circumstance did not win any one to his side.

To Miss Harriet Dray it was a grievance that she could never go in and out of her own door without passing his: behind those white walls he might be crossing himself at any moment: he did it in his own church "as bold as brass," and in ours too, when he came there of a Sunday evening (he had a curate out at Pentrehiland, and left the evening service to him) to sit in the pew belonging to Magnolia House.

"Why don't he sit in the stalls *like* a clergyman," Miss Harriet loudly complained, "and read one of the lessons as our nephew Wakefield does? I hate to see him there, in the pew, in coat and trousers."

"He couldn't well sit there without 'em, Harry," Miss Dray reminded her.

Miss Harry shook herself.

"I've no patience," she snapped. "To see him cross himself at the end of the Belief—and all the free seats nudging to look at him."

"I believe you go for nothing else yourself," her sister declared, with cheerful but provoking conviction. "You never did go to evening church till you heard

of him and his crossings. And you came home as cross as two sticks one night when he wasn't there."

"He's a Jesuit in disguise," Miss Harry opined savagely.

"If he's a Jesuit he'd disguise himself better by giving over crossing himself," observed Miss Dray.

"He's too vain to restrain himself: the man's as silly and weak as a green gosling."

"Depend upon it," said Miss Dray, "he's no Jesuit."

Mr. Smollett really seemed to exercise a fell fascination over Miss Harriet. She could not keep out of his way, and they were always running up against one another. If he came in from a ride she was sure to be starting for a walk: if he went out for a walk she would be just returning from one: and their hall-doors were not a dozen paces apart; for, as we have hinted, the front entrance of Miss Dray's house looked like a side entrance of Mr. Smollett's. On these occasions the lady would bristle up and sweep by with a bow that was a whole Confession of Augsburg in itself; and the gentleman would raise his hat with a mild air of protest at having to do it again so soon. Of course these *rencontres* did not always pass unobserved; in fact, Mrs. Moorcock noted most of them. Her house was a good hundred yards further down the street on the opposite side, but her bow-window raked it as far as the turning either way. She had no children to occupy her, and her servants gave her no trouble. Dr. Moorcock was generally out on his rounds, and Mrs. Moorcock spent most of the last

thirty years of her life knitting quilts in her bow-window, an occupation that left her perfectly free to observe anything of interest outside. True, she was not near enough to note the expression of Mr. Smollett's face as he lifted his hat, or to grasp the Protestant significance of Miss Harriet's bow: but she saw the meetings and did not attribute them to accident, on both sides at all events.

"Old Harry Dray's setting her cap at Mr. Smollett," Mrs. Moorcock informed her husband.

"You shouldn't call her old Harry: it sounds like some one else. She'll need to be as clever as her namesake if she wants to catch *that* bird."

"Well, she runs after him enough with the salt, anyway," retorted Mrs. Moorcock, giving a kind of probe into her chignon with the knitting-needle she had just knitted off; when, many a long year after I had left Gracechurch for ever, I used to see officers of the *dogana* thrusting long iron rods into the hay-carts that entered Rome from the Campagna by the Porta San Sebastiano, it never failed to remind me of Mrs. Moorcock.

Whether Miss Smollett was a Jesuit in disguise too, Gracechurch was unable to decide. She never came to church, and Miss Harry asserted her conviction that the woman was a flat Catholic, and no bones about it, a theological position as offensive evidently as that of a disguised Jesuit. Others, however, said Miss Smollett merely stayed away from church on account of her back, while some flew as far from Miss Harry's opinion as possible by declaring their



belief that the invalid lady was a Presbyterian, that she detested her brother's Popish tricks, and could not bring herself to sit in the same pew with a man who crossed himself and burrowed his head down under the bookrail during the Absolution.

"What with her back and her brother the poor thing's to be pitied *in spite of her money-bags*," said Miss Clupp, with quite angry compassion.

Miss Clupp was a superannuated nursery-governess residing in apartments, *i.e.* one blear-eyed room over Johnson's, the bookseller's, a room that always smelt of cats and printer's ink.

As to Miss Smollett's money-bags, anyone was at liberty to commiserate their owner, but no one could doubt their existence. Her horses were better than Sir James Billington's, her carriage much newer and better-built than Mrs. Wymering's of Wheatly Park; she wore expensive clothes as though she had never put on anything cheaper in her life; her coachman and footmen were well-trained London servants, tall, smart, and in first-rate liveries; and her household was, if anything, too large for her house. It was notorious in Gracechurch that she and her brother had soup and fish every day, and those who had seen her indoors declared that Miss Smollett's jewelry was good enough for Lady Gracechurch herself.

Miss Clupp, who really had nothing herself to give, was an indefatigable collector when any subscription was afoot, and on an errand of this sort she once made her way into the drawing-room of Magnolia

House. The footman had only committed himself so far as to say that he believed Miss Smollett was not at home, but would go and see, if Miss Clupp would walk in. She walked in, and noted sharply that the hall had a Turkey carpet "good enough for any nobleman's house": and, as there was no one in the drawing-room, she had leisure to take in its air of tasteful luxury, which she did with a sniff which would really have served her turn if Miss Smollett's money-bags had been sacks of guano.

Presently a very well-bred, well-dressed elderly lady came in and said simply that she was Miss Smollett's "companion"; that Miss Smollett was in, but too unwell to receive visitors to-day. Could she take any message?

Miss Clupp was not best pleased at having to declare her errand through a third party, but did so, and the lady-companion left the room, returning in less than five minutes with a ten-pound note. During her absence Miss Clupp had made up her mind that Miss Smollett's being unwell was all moonshine, and that the canny Scots lady had scented the sort of object her visitor had in view. "Trust a Scotch-woman for knowing how to defend her purse," said Miss Clupp to herself, eyeing, with another sniff, a Dresden china group that must, she often afterwards declared, have been worth a king's ransom.

"Miss Smollett is so sorry," said her *dame de compagnie*, "that she is really not fit to come down. The subscription seems to be for a most worthy object and she sends this."

When the footman showed Miss Clupp out, she was too much overcome to go far, and dropped in next door to recover herself.

No one ever saw Miss Smollett indoors so often as the writer of these papers, who had already lived four or five years in Gracechurch before his acquaintance with the high-church clergyman and his sister began.

One Sunday afternoon in spring the little boy had walked out as far as Pentrehiland to church, and on his way home, Mr. Smollett, driving himself in a neat dog-cart, with a smart groom on the back seat, overtook him.

"Shall I give you a lift?" said the gentleman, pulling up. "Come, skip up."

The small pedestrian had hesitated: partly out of shyness, partly because it seemed a strong measure, perhaps even slightly traitorous, to accept of "lifts" from the Rector's acrimonious antagonist.

"Come, you look tired, up you get," insisted the young man—he was fifteen years his sister's junior. And the little boy obeyed, not without misgiving.

It was very pleasant being driven quickly along instead of trudging through the March dust, and Mr. Smollett was pleasant too. When we got to Magnolia House he said it was tea-time, and clearly took it for granted I was to come in and have tea with him. He gave the reins to the groom and almost pushed me in. In the drawing-room his sister lay on a sofa with Miss Fergusson reading aloud to her.

"Maysie, I've brought a visitor," said Mr. Smollett. "I needn't tell you his name."

"No, my dear," the lady answered, but speaking to me, with a kind, delightful smile. "My brother has often told me about your mother and you: he says he wonders how, being deaf, she can have patience to sit through the long service in church and hear nothing. But I think from what he tells me she hears the angels singing."

She held out a very soft white hand, with splendid rings terribly loose upon it. And her brother bent over her and asked her in a low voice if she had had much pain.

"Scarcely any, Angus. . . . Tea's ready, we were only waiting for you."

The footman came in with another cup for me, and soon Miss Smollett and Miss Fergusson were busy seeing that I had cake and fruit.

When I thought it was time to go Miss Smollett said No, I must look at all her pretty things, and she sent me about the room to examine each of them while she told me all about it. Everything seemed to have some sort of history. One little silver cup had belonged to Prince Charlie, whom she called King Charles III, and she mentioned his name with a kind of sorrowful reverence.

"Do you think," she asked, "your mother would come and see me? I cannot make visits, but if she would come I should like it so much, and should be so grateful. Now, you two, run off somewhere. I want to talk secrets."

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The other lady and Mr. Smollett did what they were told, and when we were alone Miss Smollett said :

“Come here ; close to me, or I can’t talk secrets. You’ve got a new suit of clothes on ; has it pockets ?”

“It’s not a new suit,” I answered, for new clothes very seldom came my way.

“Well, it looks new. When Angus was a little boy (I was grown up, you know), he always expected me to put something in the pockets if he had a new suit. May I do it now—in yours ?”

She popped two fingers in one of my waistcoat pockets, and left two sovereigns there ; but I plucked them out again, blushing very red.

“I do not think mamma would like it,” I said, holding them out to her.

“Yes, she would, if she knew how few pleasures a poor sick woman like me can have. And listen, Johnnie. To-day I have had a legacy—I mean the news came by post this morning. An old friend of ours has died, and, to show he remembered me, he left me five hundred pounds in his will to buy a ring with. I don’t want any more rings, but I suppose I must buy one. Anyway, I made up my mind to give some one a little present to-day, and you’re the only person I have seen to give it to. Tell your mother, and you’ll see she won’t grudge me my little pleasure.”

Both my mother and I often saw Miss Smollett after that, but I was constantly being sent for to sit and talk to her while Miss Fergusson went for a drive or a walk. Sometimes she would say, “I’ve

never bought that ring ; I must see about it. Meanwhile the money is invested in the Caledonian Bank, and it's not worth while selling it out till I've made up my mind what ring to buy with it."

How many happy, very quiet hours have I spent in dear Miss Smollett's pretty drawing-room. Often reading aloud to her, at other times listening to her Scottish folk-tales and legends, of which she had a store inexhaustible ! Everything in her well-appointed house seemed to go smoothly. It was always quiet, prosperous, luxurious, without the least ostentation or extravagance. Hundreds of times I have congratulated myself on her being so well off, quite as if it were a matter of good luck personal to myself, for her wealth eased the burden of life-long ill-health and suffering. Almost all of her five-and-forty years had been spent in pain. But she was never peevish, nor had her face the sour pinched expression so commonly seen on that of a cripple.

Only once did she ever allude to her ample means, and it was in reference to her legacy, which she always seemed to regard as a sort of joke.

"I'm sure it was uncommon nice of Sir Sholto to remember me," she said, half laughing, "but I wish he had not put it on my conscience to buy another ring. He might have left me a book, or a snuff-box, or one of his top-hats—nothing could have reminded me of him like one of his hats, for no one else was ever seen in anything like them. If I had happened to be as poor as a rat I dare say he *would* have left me one of them. My Aunt Pringle, that never had six-

pence, used to tell how her godmother, Lady Money-penny, who was as rich as Dives, gave her a present, the last time she went to see her, of all the used night-light cases she had burned for thirty years.

“‘They’re surprisin’ for making a fire burn up, my dear,’ she assured Aunt Jean, ‘and I’ve saved ’em all for you that can’t afford to waste anything.’ But people don’t dare to leave or give rubbish to legatees as well off as themselves. Sir Sholto could not see his way to less than five hundred in my case, knowing that I didn’t need anything at all. Why didn’t he leave it to Angus? Angus has not five hundred a year in the world. Our father was all for spending, with nothing to spend. So was his mother. My mother had no idea of spending when she could possibly do anything else—and she had heaps of money. When Angus and I were left alone in the world, of course I wanted to share and share alike, but he wouldn’t hear of it. He’ll have it all when I’m dead, and he’ll be a young fellow still, with time enough to marry, if he wants to. All the same, I wish he would have taken half at once—though it’s all *my* mother’s money, I’m sure *his* mother was as kind to me as if I’d been her child; and he and I have never been step-brother and sister.”

As a matter of fact they lived as though they *had* shared everything. Mr. Smollett lived like a wealthy man, and it was actually he who paid all the bills, though his sister found the money.

One January evening, a fortnight or so after Christ-

mas, I was sitting with Miss Smollett, and she had been reading me little bits out of her letters—the second post was a new thing lately introduced at Gracechurch, and not approved by everybody.

“I must say *I* am glad of it,” she was saying. “I get my letters from Scotland the day after they’re written now.” Then she told me some quaint or interesting thing about her correspondents, about their homes or their family traditions. She and her brother had a way of talking to me as if I were quite grown up, and of course I liked it.

“Now there’s nothing left but the paper,” she said at last, and opened the *Scotsman* with quite an air of affection. “Dear me! This concerns me!” she cried, in a voice of mock-tragedy. “The Caledonian Bank has stopped payment! I shall not have to buy Sir Sholto’s ring after all—and I’d just decided it should be sapphires—I’ve got a half hoop of diamonds, and one of emeralds and one of rubies, you see. But, Johnnie dear! we mustn’t laugh: it’s a bad business, no doubt, for some folks . . .” and her kind voice grew grave and tender at once.

Presently Miss Fergusson came in, and her friend told her about the failure of the great bank.

“*You’ve* no shares in it, have you, Margot? No, of course. To tell the truth I half thought of giving you Sir Sholto’s five hundred pounds—only you’ll never take anything. But I dare say we shall have to hear of losses among our friends. What does unlimited liability mean?” Miss Fergusson did not quite know, but I thought an anxious look came over



her face, and wondered if some one dear to her had money in this bank.

Mr. Smollett did not come in till after I had gone home : he knew unlimited liability meant just this, that his sister had lost every penny she possessed : not only the five hundred pounds her friend had left her to buy a ring with, but all she had : her large income, her carriages, everything that had made soft the asperities of her life of pain and suffering. When she understood what had happened, all her grief was for her brother and her friend. "Oh, Angus. If only you had taken your half at once !" she cried, "you know I wanted to share and share alike. And poor Margot ! There was five thousand pounds for you in my will : and now I've nothing to leave either of you. I thought it would be so soon that I needn't insist on having my own way at once—and people are so queer, they don't like being *given* what is going to be theirs, till one is dead." She had not a thought to give to her own great loss.

"Well, well," she said in her quaint half-joky way, "I've often worried about the eye of a needle, I was such a camel ! *That* needn't puzzle me any more."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BILLINGTON PEW

ALMOST everyone at Gracechurch lived in a street : but the streets had mostly, so to speak, no backs to them. Almost all the houses had green fields, or the pretty shore of the lake, behind : and, of course, every genteel residence had its garden, full of fruit-trees and old-fashioned flower-borders.

When we went to the little town, we lodged at first in Watergate, which really was a street, and rather an ugly one, with the backs of other poorish houses behind it instead of nice gardens. Even Watergate House, where the independent Miss Pughs lived, had not much ground of its own at the back, though its blue window on the stairs looked askance into the garden of Miss Mildstone's house ; beyond the garden Miss Mildstone had a paddock in which her cow lived retired from the world, never mixing in Society, and probably under the impression that she was the only animal of her kind in existence.

Miss Mildstone's house stood at the bottom of Church Street, with all the front windows facing that way ; but only the hall and two small parlours looked on the street ; the drawing-room, where Miss Mildstone sat, mostly alone, indulging her extreme refinement, faced

the garden, so did her bedroom upstairs, so did the dining-room. It was always called Miss Mildstone's house, though her mother was still alive. Mrs. Mildstone was not nearly so refined as her daughter, and sat in the breakfast-room—where no human being had ever breakfasted—on the right as you came in by the hall door. She was a pretty old lady, with bright cheerful eyes and an inexhaustible memory concerning the pedigrees of all the county gentry around. Miss Mildstone did not think it refined to know about the pedigrees of people who had not called ; she sat by herself reading the *Monthly Packet*, and regretting that she had not a longer one of her own. Her father had been much respected, and died well off, so that she and her sister had each five thousand pounds. Incredible as it may seem she had never had three sisters ; there had only been three Miss Mildstones altogether. Miss Mary had died young of a cold caught at her first ball. Miss Valeria had entrusted her five thousand pounds to a wealthy cotton-broker at Liverpool, who had made them into ten, and was now Mrs. Duddlewhite. Miss Mildstone would have liked to be "Valeria" herself, and it was tiresome that her name was actually Sarah Jane. The late Mr. Mildstone had of course a father too : he was buried in the churchyard (exactly where his granddaughter had to pass him every time she went to church), but his tombstone only stated that it was "Sacred to the Memory of Jonathan Mildstone, Gent : late of this Parish : who was an Affectionate Husband and Devoted Parent, and of Such is the Kingdom of heaven." It left to the mere

laws of probability the question of his also having had a father—omitting even to insist on his having been a dutiful son. That he should be described as “Gent.” instead of “Esq.” was a daily trial to Miss Mildstone, for she daily picked her way up Church Street to be present at “Early Service,” never noting anything as she went, for she had learned (while at the Misses Broom’s establishment for young ladies at Grace-minster), that it is not refined to look about you or to observe the behaviour of common people. Mrs. Mildstone made up for it. From her window in the breakfast-room she saw everybody that went by, and knew perfectly well what everyone was about.

“There’s old Richards, with his basket, going up to Gracechurch House for his bits,” she would say, over her knitting. “Mrs. Richards used to go, but now she’s too old he has to, and makes a fine grumble about its wasting his time, instead of being pretty and thankful to the Miss Graces for letting him have ’em. And good bits too. Saturday was a week he spilt his basket over there—James Nunnerly ran against him at the corner: Jim spends a deal more than he should at the Cross Keys—if he goes in wunst of a morning to the Cross Keys, he goes half a dozen times; and his wife charring all the time, while he tramps about the town like a recruiting sergeant: so old Richards’ bits were all on the flagstones—and Mrs. Tims she came out and went on at him, for it was Saturday and she’d just cleaned her street. I never saw better bits. There was half a rabbit, and it’s unknown how many pieces of cold toast. But it

was the coffee that made Mrs. Tims so fierce with him for spoiling her street." It was the cleanly habit of Gracechurch housewives to scrub the length of pavement in front of their houses every Saturday morning, as sedulously as if it had been their own kitchen floor. Even to walk over the newly-cleaned "street" with muddy boots was held poor manners in any but the recognised gentry—the independents; and the gentry did not sally abroad much till the day was sufficiently advanced for the "street" to have dried.

Cleanliness was not next to godliness at Gracechurch; it was godliness. All the Ten Commandments, so far as Mrs. Tims and Mrs. Hornskull understood them, meant the same thing—"Scrub!"

Mrs. Mildstone always sat close to the window with a Church Service and a key basket on a small table at her elbow. She was excellent company, and I was very fond of sitting with her. But Miss Mildstone would generally crop up and carry any visitor away to the drawing-room. She was an excellent young woman, and, I am sure, very fond of her "Mamma"; but she was beset by a dread lest the old lady should seem not very refined to callers of modern views. For Mrs. Mildstone said "wunst" instead of "once," and spoke of its being "tay-time" and was much "obleeged" to you. As for Miss Mildstone, she was made up of refinement, so that without it there would hardly have been any of her left. She could only by an effort bring herself to allude to any gentleman by his name: thus she would speak of our two curates, if they happened to be

the subject of conversation, as "the male" (which always meant Mr. Ireton, her favourite), and "the other," as though Mr. Draper had been a lady, whereas he was not himself quite sure he was even a gentleman. Mr. Ireton was more, he was of a county family, younger son of some very big squire, whose ancestor had signed King Charles the Martyr's death-warrant. Our Mr. Ireton had long pale hands and thin pale lips, a pale smile, and the palest possible blue eyes. He preached pale sermons of invariable length, from a neat manuscript off which he never raised his eyes; what they were about no one, I think, had the faintest idea; but it was usual to speak of them as being "scholarly," and Miss Mildstone listened to them with a devout certainty of their being models of pastoral refinement. When he left us at last it was to subside prosperously into a fat family living, with a fine rectory and scarcely any parishioners, somewhere away in the Midlands, and to marry his cousin Lady Marjory Eagleshaw, ninth daughter of Earl Hawkswood.

It was not so amusing sitting with Miss Mildstone in the drawing-room as with her mother in the little room that looked on the street. There was less to see and nothing at all to hear. The garden was rather dull, consisting chiefly of an oval croquet-lawn, on which no one ever played except unbidden cats, that did not belong to Miss Mildstone. At times she would open the French window and urge Fido, her dog, to go forth and drive them away. But Fido was of a full habit of body, and, from over-indulgence in the

pleasures of the table, had grown apathetic in the matter of cats, and preferred the hearth-rug. He was of a placable temperament and averse from the fatigue of killing anything, though able to enjoy rolling in anything already dead which he might happen to find. When this had been the case his mistress would say, "Fido, you're not very sweet to-day," and ask you to ring for Maria.

Maria had then to remove Fido and wash him. She was herself much more like a dog than Fido, but of a different kind. Her features were squeezed up like a pug's, and she had the same queer marks and wrinkles in her forehead, and the same gaspy manner. She was not young when we went to Gracechurch, and was not a bit older, so far as one could see, when we left it fifteen years later. She was honest, cross, and faithful, with a rabid disapproval of "followers," which would have been more serviceable to her successive colleagues, who were generally young and rather pretty. When Miss Mildstone's bell rang in the middle of a winter's night, it was Maria's office to get up and make cocoa for her mistress, who was liable to waken an hour or so after midnight with a "sinking feeling."

On Sunday mornings Mrs. Mildstone, in traditional but handsome black silks, accompanied her daughter to church: to evening service Miss Mildstone was chaperoned by Maria, who carried her prayer-book, and sat at the mouth of the pew, in the draught from the north door, where she had to pray into an uncompromising pillar that allowed her to see nothing but the shadow of her own bonnet.

The chief annoyance of Miss Mildstone's prosperous well-cushioned life was, not that she had no admirer, but that she had had one for years. His name was Zerubabel Pott, added to which he was a small solicitor's clerk, had damp hands and an oily skin ; otherwise he was esteemed well-looking, and he could have afforded to marry anyone who, like Miss Mildstone, had five thousand pounds. About four times a year (just after quarter-day) he called, and it was universally believed in Gracechurch that he proposed to Miss Mildstone at every visit. Her refusal must have become, after a dozen years of it, mechanical, and her manner was always gracefully apathetic. Perhaps that was why he persevered undaunted.

But, however inert her opposition to these overtures may have seemed, it was deep and unwavering ; if she disliked any "male" on earth that "male" was Zerubabel Pott. To her he was the embodiment of vulgarity with his thick black curls, that shone like bars of a newly-polished grate, his sloe-black eyes, and fat neck well displayed by a very low collar. Any one of the Miss Gwynnes would have married Mr. Pott if only he had asked one of them first, and Mrs. Gwynne had no patience with Miss Mildstone for not taking him.

"He's not gentleman enough for her to be sure !" she would say with a shake of her curls. "Her that's old Jonathan Mildstone's granddaughter—as I remember when he used to sweep Lawyer Pepper's office. Sandy he was, and freckled like a turkey egg. It was thought a fine thing for him when he married Sarah Oakes, a tenant-farmer's daughter, and a thousand



pounds o' fortune ; forty if she was a day, and a hare-lip—so's 'twas a pity her moustache wasn't thick enough to hide it. Why's Bubble Pott not to look at her? With her money old Lawyer Twiss 'ud take him in partnership—it's well known Pott does all the business. She may go to early church till she catches her death on an empty stomach, but Rev. Ireton 'll never think of her."

"She always has hot milk and pearl biscuits before she starts," said Selina Gwynne, who liked accuracy in details.

"Well, none of you aren't going to early church, pearl biscuits or mother-o'-pearl, so mind my word ! In my time it was enough to Remember now thy Creator of a Sunday, and not be spreading the Lord's Day all over the week, goin' against the Scripture and all. 'One day in seven shall be Mine,' it says ; there was no early church in Moses's time, I reckon. If 'twas to be church every day there'd ha' been no Mondays and Tuesdays, only Sundays from the beginning of one week to the end of the next."

After we had lodged for a while in Watergate, Mrs. Hornskull broke to us that she thought of moving to more attractive quarters in Scotland Street ; and move we all did. In front, our new house commanded an extensive view of a piece of waste ground where rubbish was shot, and Jemmy Kelly, the rag-and-bone man, turned out his donkey to pasture on thistles and docks. One side of Chapel Street ran up this bit of no-man's-land, towards the Wesleyan chapel, which gave it its name ; so that we were in a position to compile

accurate laundry lists for all the cottages, had they wished. Only our bedrooms, however, looked that way. Our sitting-room had a more rural prospect of some one else's garden, the principal feature of which was a noble "midden," as Mrs. Hornskull called it, on which manure-heap the proprietor would stand of a warm evening pensively adjusting its more recent layers with a pikel. Lest the uninstructed should be in doubt as to the meaning of this word, we may explain that it meant a long-handled, two-pronged hay-fork.

On such occasions we preferred the view from the front, especially if there happened to be a westerly breeze and the weather were sultry. So we often sat in my mother's bedroom, where we saw Sir James Billington go by times without number.

Before, however, we say any more of Sir James and his famous funeral, it may as well be stated here how we came to leave Scotland Street and move to our third lodgings.

One day at luncheon—or dinner rather, for our evening meal was "high" tea, of no giddy altitude—we had apple-pie, and my mother swallowed a bit of core that stuck half-way, and would neither come up or go down. I fled for Mrs. Hornskull, who seized a sauce-pan, and came at once to the rescue. But my mother had already rushed upstairs for her bonnet, and she and I were soon hurrying off to the doctor's. By a lucky chance he was in, and he produced an instrument like a very small hearth-broom, whose bristles folded down flat like an umbrella. This he thrust

down the patient's throat, and pushing a sort of sliding spring, caused the bristles to fan out, when he dragged it up again—and the apple-core with it.

"So you're not dead, ma'am," he observed with cheerful grimness, washing his little umbrella in a basin, and then drying his hands on a jack-towel.

When my mother asked what she owed him, he promised to send in his bill at Christmas ; but that Christmas never came, neither that year, nor in all the long series of years following, during which Dr. Hart attended to the health of this poor widow and her boys. It must be remembered that Dr. Hart made up his own medicines (and, as he complacently, but without exaggeration declared, "sufficiently beastly" they were), and neither for attendance nor drugs did he ever charge these patients of his one penny.

On the evening following this dramatic introduction, Dr. Hart "looked round" to see if my mother was quite recovered. It was hot, and the spicy breeze that came in by the open window had not passed in vain over our neighbour's midden.

"Good Lord !" said the doctor, making a face as if he had swallowed one of his own pills by mistake.

"We never sit here, if the wind's this way, when we're by ourselves," my mother assured him.

On his way out he attacked Mrs. Hornskull, but that lady averred first that she couldn't perceive nothing, and then that it was considered healthy, and altogether refused to tackle the owner of the property in question, as he was her landlord.

"Then you must change your lodgings," said the

doctor, coming back into the parlour with his hat on. Dr. Hart made no great account of manners, which he held to be slightly effeminate, and he was not thinking of his hat, but of typhoid fever.

The end of it all was that the doctor insisted we should leave the Scotland Street house, and Mrs. Hornskull asserted her intention of dying there.

"Let folks as likes change house every quarter-day," she observed severely, "I come here to die here, and here I'll bide till I do die. If Mr. Povey's not to have his own midden in his own garden, where *is* he to have it? And him so clean—why, for all he's a widower, you could eat your dinner off his kitchen floor—'tis as clean as a palace."

By this rhetoric Mrs. Hornskull, who was but sixty, and of an iron constitution, by no means implied that she had fled to Scotland Street as anticipating a speedy period to her existence—merely that she had assured herself it should be her last change of residence. Personally I always suspected that she made the change from the Watergate to rid herself of a married daughter whose husband drank and was "obstrapolus" in his cups—that is to say that he would not sit where his mother-in-law bade him, "in his stocking feet, so's not to mucky her kitchen." In the Scotland Street house there was no room for them.

Mrs. Hornskull never forgave Dr. Hart for being the cause of our removal, and thoroughly despised my mother for her weakness in listening to him.

"Men's nonsense is what I never *would* hearken

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to," she declared, "and I've had seven children and buried four."

So, pursued by Mrs. Hornskull's ironical hopes that we might get our healths in Church Street, we moved to our new lodgings over a cabinet-maker's in that genteel quarter.

But it was while we were at Mrs. Hornskull's in Scotland Street that we used to see Sir James Billington go by.

On the first occasion Mrs. Hornskull rushed up from the kitchen, with a half-skinned rabbit dangling in her hand, and cried out :

"Look out ! Look out o' the window, ma'am, and you'll see Sir James Billington o' Coldacre Hall—he's goin' by, and you can see him."

I, at all events, hastened to enjoy the sight, and found it an anticlimax.

A huge wagonette, that might easily have carried a dozen baronets, was moving by at a foot-pace, drawn by very tall black horses of a hearsey demeanour. An elderly footman sat by the elderly coachman on the box and surveyed Gracechurch coldly, for Sir James's property ran out in the other direction, and he did not own a single house or cottage in the town.

"There he is," whispered Mrs. Hornskull, indicating, with one naked leg of the rabbit, an old man hobbling along on two sticks at the edge of the bit of waste ground.

"That's Sir James Billin'ton o' Coldacre Hall."

As he seemed to walk with difficulty, and there was

undoubtedly room for him in the carriage, it seemed hard to understand why he had chosen to get out.

"Ah! That's his way. He never does nothing like other folks, Sir James don't."

He wasn't much to look at, Sir James wasn't. Of an awkward shambling gait, he seemed twisted all to one side, and it was the business of his unwieldy body to get his legs along, rather than theirs to support and move his body—the two sticks did that. His face was ugly and ill-favoured, his features bloated, his dress suggested that of an undertaker in a painfully healthy neighbourhood.

"You listen a minute and he'll swear," said Mrs. Hornskull, as though proudly directing attention to accomplishments reflecting some distinction on herself.

My mother was precluded by her deafness from enjoying the promised privilege; but I was not long kept waiting.

A little boy, carrying some live poultry in a covered basket, chose to try if he could not walk backwards as quickly as forwards, and approached in this fashion within a yard or so of the irascible baronet. Perhaps the hens, which cackled as loudly as though each of them had an accouchement to announce, prevented the boy from hearing the old gentleman's shambling steps—Sir James was terribly gouty and wore felt shoes. Anyway he would certainly have walked backwards into the pit of Sir James's stomach, had not the knight stood still and yelled out a furious warning.

Till that moment I had no idea there were so many awful words in the decorous English language.

"Did you ever!" whispered Mrs. Hornskull, "that's Sir James all over. Didn't I tell you?"

Long after the offending boy had sought safety in flight the morning air was shaken with explosion after explosion of Sir James's frantic wrath.

Even my mother could *see* that he was swearing, till it seemed inevitable he should have a fit or an apoplexy.

When Sir James was gone, hoisted back into the carriage by the elderly footman, Mrs. Hornskull, rather superfluously, assured us that he was a terrible man.

"It's not words only—not that he can do much now—but he's all the mind to it."

All the same she spoke of his wickedness with a sort of gusto that was half respectful.

"It's a fine place, Coldacre Hall, and ten thousand a year property; and *he* was a fine man too in his time: the handsomest gentleman in all the country round the Wrekin; and clever they say, and such manners as none o' the young gentry can come up to nowadays. No, he never married—best luck for his wife. And he's no one belonging to him but old Mrs. Redding, his sister, as he's niver spoken to for forty year. She'll have Coldacre Hall when he dies though—unless he can outlive her, as he's set on; she's a year older than him, and he'll not let her come in if he can help it. Some says that's why he gets out o' his carriage and walks—to keep

the gout off that's threatening to kill him all the while. They say as he offered Dr. Hart to give him £5000 if he'd keep him alive five years : Mrs. Redding would be over eighty by then and has asthmy as fo'ces her to sit up in bed all night like a coachman on a box. But Dr. Hart's very independent, and would speak as free to a lord as to a loon, and he told Sir James there were fifty people he'd liever keep alive for nothing ; and said as a parson would be more use to him than a doctor—not as I believe that part of it, for Dr. Hart ain't over-fond of parsons himself and never goes anigh church hardly—Dr. Moorcock, he goes every Sunday regular with Mrs. Moorcock, and his man calls him out at the second lesson. That's Sir James Billington ; and I daresay you'll see him often, for Coldacre Hall lies but a couple of miles out, this way, and he comes in most weeks to get money from the bank and that."

We were thus encouraged to hope that our first sight of Sir James would not be our last, nor was it. As Mrs. Hornskull said, he came by once a week or so ; and, if he did not always swear immediately opposite our window, he always looked ready to do so.

Just after we left Scotland Street, Sir James went up to London to try and find a doctor who would undertake to keep him alive till after his sister's decease. Whether he found one I don't know, but whatever promises were made to him, an accident prevented their being kept. His club was near his hotel, and one evening he sent his carriage away,



chiefly because the coachman rather earnestly proposed waiting for him. When he started home it was dusk, and a misty evening with the streets slimy and slippery : in Piccadilly Sir James had to cross the street, and one of his sticks slipped upon a piece of orange peel, and a hansom cab went over one of his legs. He was quite unconscious when they picked him up and carried him to St. George's Hospital. For hours he lay stunned and insensible, for his head had come in violent contact with a kerbstone. When he recovered consciousness a nurse was bending over him, and by the dim light he could see rows of beds.

"Where am I?" he asked fiercely, with an oath that made the nurse skip like a pea on a drum.

"In St. George's Hospital," she blurted out. "You must really lie still and keep quiet or ——"

"*I lie still ! I lie still in St. George's Hospital.—* Do you know who you're telling to keep quiet?—I'm Sir James Billington, of Coldacre ; who the —— brought me to a —— hospital ? Take me away at once.—— Now. Now, this instant." And the terrible old man started up and would have dragged his broken leg out of bed there and then if they had let him. He had roused all the patients by his yells and curses ; nurses and male attendants rushed to his side, and he was forced to lie where he was ; but only till a carriage could be got ready to take him away, for he insisted on being removed in spite of every entreaty of the nurses, every threat of the doctors. And home he was carried, not to the hotel, but to his great house in Eaton Place, where there was only a care-

taker. The move settled his fate, and in twenty-four hours he was dead.

But they brought him down to Coldacre to be buried in the huge family vault in Gracechurch church. Over it was an enormous pew, the only real old-fashioned pew left in the church. When Mr. Knight had the church restored Sir James gave a thousand pounds to the fund on condition his family pew was left untouched, though he never sat in it, or darkened the door of any church for the last forty years of his life.

It occupied nearly the whole of what had once been the Lady Chapel, to the left of the choir ; and, as if the oak panels did not reach high enough up, along the top ran a brass rail with silk curtains. By Mrs. Redding's order the pew was now upholstered in black cloth ; all the floor was covered with a thick black carpet—only in one place, close to the seat she intended to occupy herself, where she had sat long ago as a girl, there was a square hole filled with glass.

Sir James had a splendid funeral, and the streets were crowded with our townspeople and country folk come in to see it. The hearse was enormous and looked like a moving nursery of black Christmas trees. There were strings of mourning coaches, and Mrs. Redding in one of them, all crape from head to foot, but with an odd expression on her face.

Church Street was lined by soldiers of the yeomanry cavalry Sir James had once commanded, and in the procession marched two companies of the Rifle

Volunteers. There were mutes and black hangings, and all the dismal parade a ghoulish taste could conceive.

The people were quiet and talked only in low tones ; it was odd to note how they spoke of his wealth, all useless to him now, of his mad pranks long ago, his skill as a sportsman, his cruel practical jokes, his luxury in food and drink, his fine horses, the handsome face God had given him, and great position—and not one word of any good thing he had ever done. Surely, if he had been lavish through so long a life, he must have been generous at times ; there was no mention of it. Nor was there a hint of his death being a loss or a grief to anyone ; that his sister saw to his having so fine a funeral was attributed to no regard for him, but to her sense of the family dignity of which once, in her far-away girlhood, she had been less mindful. For she had fallen in love with a young man of attractive manners and appearance, a gentleman, but of no great family, and only of moderate means. Her own fortune was enough for both, her parents being dead and she just of full age, and able to please herself. She became engaged and had every intention of marrying, in spite of the furious opposition of her brother, who, of course, could have no legal control of her. Nevertheless he stopped the marriage. Meeting his proposed brother-in-law in a club at Graceminster he publicly insulted him, and forced him to a meeting, in which the young lover was killed—Sir James was famed for his skill as a fencer, and in the use of pistols. When the news of her loss reached Coldacre

—it was her brother who brought it—Joan Billington left her home at once and for ever, flying to a sister of her mother's with whom she lived till her marriage, as an almost elderly woman, with the elderly and aristocratic Mr. Redding, younger son of one Lord Reddingthorpe, and uncle of another, who died a year or two later. Brother and sister never met again, and never exchanged letter or message, except through the family lawyers.

She came down to Coldacre the evening before the funeral, long after the coffins, one of lead and one of oak, had been sealed up, and only asked if all had been done in accordance with her directions. The most peculiar of these was that over the head there should be a plate of thick glass in each coffin ; and this had been done.

The coffin was to be so placed in the vault that the glass in the lid should lie close under the square of glass in the floor of the pew. And this fearful arrangement was carried out : the whole chapel, of which the pew took up so large a part, was now Mrs. Redding's freehold, and she was obstinate in having her own way. Without a lawsuit about it the rector could not interfere, and out of a lawsuit he might have got nothing.

On the Sunday following the funeral Mrs. Redding in all her pomp of mourning, and looking vigorous still, in spite of her fourscore years, came to church, attended by waiting-woman and footman, carrying prayer-books, fan, and smelling-bottle. The same odd expression was on her face that people had seen with

wonder at the funeral ; it was certainly not grief, but rather suggested a triumphant consciousness of survival.

The footman held open the pew-door ; the maid stood aside, and the lady entered. She walked across to a tall black hassock and knelt upon it, lifting her eyes to the new hatchment with all the Billington quarterings, and the Billington supporters—two angels. Under the arms was the motto, *Non Oblitus Sum*. Mrs. Redding knew what it meant, and a queer smile puckered her old mouth as she rose and walked across to the seat she intended to occupy, and sat down. The footman handed her books, the maid her fan and salts ; she took them, and then, with easy deliberation, leant forward and turned her eyes down upon the glass in the floor at her feet. Till then the same imperturbable expression had been always on her face. One look changed it—and forever : with a horror in her eyes that never left them during the short remnant of her life, she struggled to her feet, and shambled towards the door of the pew ; the footman and maid had to hold her up between them as she tottered away to the south door of the church with the voice of the clergyman in her ears as he read out the first words of the service . . . “When the wicked man . . .”

## CHAPTER V

### MADDY KICKSTONE

CONSIDERING how beautiful the country round Gracechurch was, the approaches to the town, with one exception, were not very pretty. Nothing, however, could be prettier in its way than the entrance by the Rentminster road, with the lovely lake on one side, and the long gardens of Gracechurch House on the other. Gracemere is full three miles round, and has two islands ; Wheatley Park skirts one end of it, and one might often see the deer come down to the water to drink. Beautiful woods line the banks of the mere in some places, and scarcely less lovely meadows slope down to it in others.

It was always felt in the town a flattering circumstance that "the Marquess" should draw his title from Gracechurch, seeing that Graceminster and Gracechester (pronounced, of course, "Grayster") were larger places, and that his lordship owned as much property in each of them as he did in our favoured town.

Less than a hundred years ago there was a Duke of Gracechurch, Peregrine Frederick Augustus Adolphus, fourth Duke and seventh Marquess of Gracechurch, Earl of Pimpley and Graceminster, and Baron Gracemere, Cockshott, Boarwood, and

Rugton, in comparison with whom other Dukes were mere Viscounts, so to speak. Besides having enormous wealth and influence he was almost everything a Duke could be, Lord-Lieutenant of three counties, Rentshire, Fenshire, and Rainshire, Lord Warden of the Middle Marches, Hereditary Master of the Boarhounds, Steward of the Royal Butteries, Keeper of the Private Signet, and Principal Secretary of State for the Defence Department under three successive Governments. He became a Knight of the Garter so early in life that there really seemed nothing left for him to receive, and the only mark of royal confidence the Prince Regent could show was to borrow large sums of money from him in the most intimate and affectionate manner. Some say that was why the Duke was able to exact an undertaking that on his own death his son-in-law, Lord Fenny-Stanton, should be created Marquess of Gracechurch. For, with all his great qualities, his Grace had never had a son. He had three daughters, Lady Peregrina, who married Lord Fenny-Stanton, and became presently Marchioness of Gracechurch ; Lady Adolpha, who married the famous Mr. Ploughder, nephew of the Duke of Vectis, and Member for Goodwin Sands during part of three reigns—George III's, George IV's, and William IV's. After the Reform Bill of 1833 this statesman was created Baron Gracemere ; and Lady Sophia, for so many years Lady-in-Waiting to her late Royal Highness the Duchess of Middlesex—her monument is in Gracechurch church, and represents an allegorical figure,

holding a medallion of her ladyship in one hand and an inverted torch in the other, leaning in an attitude expressive of fatigue against the stump of an old tree that may have thought it was a willow but wasn't sure whether it was not a laurel.

When Lord Fenny-Stanton became Marquess of Gracechurch, of course he took the surname of Grace ; his father had married the only daughter and heiress of the Earl of Tilbury and taken *her* name, so that the present noble family are called Stanton-Tilbury-Grace. All these matters are discussed with perennial interest at Gracechurch.

Not that the Marquess is often seen there by his lieges. He lives for the most part in Fenshire at Castle Fenby, and has another huge home in Rainshire—Rainham Hall, where he endeavours to spend a couple of months annually on his way to the great town house, which is really a palace, overlooking the Green Park, of which he is Ranger. When he came of age he paid Gracechurch a visit and another on his marriage. I remember the latter occasion very well. A troop of the Rentshire Yeomanry Cavalry escorted him from the station, as soon as he had received addresses from the Mayor and Corporation and other local bodies ; and a guard of honour of the Rifle Volunteers was drawn up outside Gracechurch House, where the Marchioness was presented with bouquets by the head scholars of nineteen schools. Her ladyship did not make a speech, but bowed nineteen times, and smiled fourteen times : the other five times she was trying not to yawn and



had no room for the smiles on her beautiful mouth—Lady Gracechurch came of the handsomest family in England, and was its loveliest representative.

All the town was decorated : there were triumphal arches at the beginning of each street with *Welcome to the Marquess and Marchioness of Gracechurch* on every one of them in letters taller than I was, and Lord Gracechurch slightly frowned at one of them on which his title was spelled MARQUIS, as though he had been a mere foreign nobleman. Flags on poles stuck out of every second window, and Venetian masts, like enormous sugar-sticks, were to be seen in all directions. The church bells rang triple Bob Majors all the afternoon, so that the genteel residents of Church Street had to yell their mutual felicitations in one another's ears. A salute was fired from the Crimean cannon mounted on the town bowling-green, and as it had to cool a little between each discharge, the effect had all the solemnity of minute guns.

There was a dinner-party of forty covers at Gracechurch House that night, and on the night following, during which the band of the Rifle Volunteers "discoursed sweet music" (said the Gracechurch *Blue Banner* of the next week) "in the gardens contiguous to the residence."

On the day after their arrival the Marquess and Marchioness rested after their journey, that is to say they stayed in to receive the visits of all the magnates of the county—Miss Broom, who came in to her town residence on purpose, counted thirty-seven "equipages," exclusive of wagonettes and pony-

carriages in which the rectors and vicars of the neighbourhood arrived to pay their respects, for Lord Gracechurch is patron of twenty-one livings.

On the following day after luncheon the Marquess, with the Marchioness on his arm, sallied forth from Gracechurch House and led her down a broad lane of red carpet to an immense and very handsome marquee of red and white stripes set up in the grounds by the lake. The way was lined with spectators, and Lord Gracechurch bowed at intervals to those on his left, while her ladyship did the same to those on her right. Behind them came Colonel Grace and his family, with the guests who had been invited to luncheon.

In the marquee was a daïs, covered with red cloth, on which were two arm-chairs, which Miss Broom always spoke of afterwards as "the thrones." On these Lord and Lady Gracechurch sat down for a brief repose after their fatiguing walk of nearly half a quarter of a mile. Then they rose and stood a step forward, while four addresses were presented: one from the great farmers, in a silver casket—this was very curly, and kept flying up, like a patent blind, as a very nervous farmer—Mr. Broadbin of Sheepwash—tried to read it: one from the householders of Gracechurch, in a Russia-leather diptych: one from the cottagers, framed and glazed; and one from the labourers and workmen on the estate, on two rollers, like a half-grown banner. A present accompanied each address: a splendid gold bracelet, with a large sapphire flanked by two large diamonds, from

the farmers : a pendant from the householders, which Miss Brown declared was "very chaste" : a silver bowl, rather like a prize for successful pugilism, from the cottagers ; and a sort of font, made of one block of marble from his lordship's quarries, from the workmen.

Lord Gracechurch replied in one stately address like a speech from the Throne, in the course of which he turned slightly in the direction of the representatives of each of the four classes of his subjects. Then the Marchioness expressed her thanks for the gifts : the bracelet she would wear constantly (Lord Gracechurch clasped it on her arm, and it was firmly believed by the donors that she never afterwards removed it day or night) ; the pendant would be her most valued jewel (Colonel Grace endeavoured to put it on, but forgot to undo the fastening of the chain, and it would not go over her bonnet) : the silver bowl should stand on her own writing-table and be kept full of sweet flowers to remind her of what she never could forget, the sweet friendliness of the kindly givers ;—what, I wondered breathlessly, would she do with the font ? Four perspiring though stalwart workmen hitched it nearer at a sign from their foreman, and humped up the red carpet into a wrinkle in doing so.

"*Your* gift," said her ladyship, "has a peculiar interest, being the work of your own hands" (the men she addressed were carpenters and plasterers and looked guilty), "and being fashioned out of the beautiful local marble."

She could not promise to wear it constantly, nor to

stand it on her writing-table, and paused for one brief moment with her deep and lovely dark-blue eyes bent on it—then, being as clever as she was beautiful, she said, in a tone that was almost confidential :

“In my garden there is a pretty jet of water flowing out of a rock, and at present it flows into nothing. It shall now stream into this f—— receptacle. And so when I want a draught of the clear and cool water it will always be ready.”

(“Doddles,” said her husband afterwards, “I pictured you in that bonnet, trying to lap up the water out of the font without drenching the feathers.”)

Though Lord Gracechurch could call his wife Doddles in private, his demeanour to her in the marquess was that of a sovereign to his consort. Miss Broom did not exaggerate when she said that his lordship’s mien was “most noble—as became a Marquess.”

“All the same,” observed Miss Dray, who knew all about such things, and never let an inaccuracy slip by unnoted, “a Marquess is Most Honourable, not Most Noble—only Dukes are Most Noble.”

During dessert that evening I stood at Lady Gracechurch’s elbow, between her and Colonel Grace, and it was easy to see that she liked chaffing him a little. Until her recent marriage she had been Lady Gladys de Bohun, and her father, the Duke of Solway, had many sons, one of whom, it now appeared, had just changed his name under the conditions of a will by which he acquired a large fortune.

“Of course,” said Colonel Grace, “twenty thousand

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a year couldn't be let go : all the same I can scarcely understand how your brother could bring himself to exchange the historic name of De Bohun for that of March."

Lady Gracechurch assumed an air of melancholy and replied :

"These misfortunes run in families, Peregrine ; *I* brought myself to exchange the historic name of De Bohun for that of Grace."

On the next day Lord and Lady Gracechurch went away ; the Venetian masts began to disappear, the triumphal arches were taken down, and the flags all rolled up and put away : the town had to settle down again into its normal state of genteel somnolence, and the slightly unearthly feeling of the last day or two to give way to more humdrum reality.

Still there was plenty to talk about—what a witty speech Colonel Grace had made, after the Marquess and Marchioness, in the marquee : how charming Mrs. Grace and her lovely daughters had looked, and how thoroughly they understood how to dress. On this occasion Mrs. Grace, who "became" rich clothes, had left magnificence to the Marchioness, and the costumes of the young ladies had been triumphs of simple freshness and elegance.

"Mrs. Dovey, however," said Miss Dray, "was splendid enough for us all. In her ruby plush she looked like a Utrecht velvet settee ; it was kind of Lady Gracechurch not to sit upon her."

Mrs. Dovey was the wife of a very wealthy farmer, and had acted as *doyenne* of the farmeresses, Mr. Broad-

bin of Sheepwash being (unfortunately, as he felt for the moment) a widower.

"How well Colonel Grace did the presentations," remarked Miss Broom; "it is plain he hasn't forgotten the ways of Courts."

(Many years before the Colonel had been Aide-de-Camp to a Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland.)

"They were not presentations; they were only introductions," said Miss Dray.

I must say they had had all the air of "presentations," except that Lord and Lady Gracechurch did not occupy their "thrones" while they were in progress.

For nearly an hour they had stood on their daïs, their relations and friends in a semicircle behind them, while Colonel Grace, on the top step, announced the names of the *presentees*, as they came forward and bowed or curtsied, at the foot of the steps. Some of the farmers butted, and one or two nodded with more ease than grace, but most of them bowed creakily from the waist: and the curtseys were, like Mr. Weller's knowledge of London, extensive and peculiar. One lady nearly curtsied herself over backwards, and was saved only by the presence of mind of a young Volunteer Officer, a miller in private life, who was acting as a sort of extra A.D.C. (unpaid); Captain Bran met the broad of Mrs. Pudlow's back with his left epaulet (a kind of stiff eyebrow of black worsted) and hitched her back again into the perpendicular as unaffectedly as though she had been a four-bushel sack of middlings.

When the fifteen hundred "presentations" were over, Colonel Grace brought up the heads of the four Committees by whom addresses and presents had been given, and mentioned their names to Lord and Lady Gracechurch, his lordship bowing to the ladies and her ladyship bowing to the gentlemen, and addressing a sentence or so to each group.

Returning to Gracechurch House, when the ceremonies in the marquee were concluded, the Marquess and Marchioness entered a carriage and drove off to open a Flower Show on the Town Bowling Green, which they did apparently without difficulty as it only took ten minutes, after which they laid the foundation-stone of a new Drill Hall that looked nearly finished already, and received an address from the Rifle Volunteers, presented by Colonel Bobby, our principal grocer, their gallant commanding officer.

It was rumoured that Lord Gracechurch had "made some bones" about consenting to accept this address on the ground that only to the Sovereign and Royal Family were such honours usually offered by corps in Her Majesty's forces.

The "Rifles" were depressed, Colonel Bobby was bowed to the earth with chagrin and disappointment—Miss Broom, who had heard the dismal rumour and stepped as far as Market Street to buy a pound of tea, averred that he could not answer her sympathetic inquiries, and that the tears actually fell from his eyes, into the canister. But Colonel Grace came to the rescue : he urged in favour of the address that it could

not matter sixpence to Queen Victoria or anyone else whether it were presented or no ; that there were four hundred and seventeen men in the corps, almost all married men with wives and families, so that fifteen hundred or two thousand deserving persons would feel snubbed if the address were not accepted : and, above all, that poor Bobby (an excellent man and brother-in-law to Mrs. Grace's own maid Growder, the most faithful creature) was a Dissenter, and not only he himself, but every Dissenter in Gracechurch would live and die in the belief that the address was refused out of Church Arrogance.

Lord Gracechurch yielded the point, and, by the time Colonel Bobby left the shop to go to his dinner upstairs, a messenger, whose feet Bobby would have thought lovely on the flattest ground, was hurrying from Gracechurch House with the glad tidings.

Mrs. Bobby received her lord grimly. If public slights were put upon him, and put up with, it would be ridiculous in him to expect that conjugal deference commanded naturally by a husband high in civic importance and military rank.

Poor Bobby knew his wife well and did *not* expect it ; perhaps that was why he had cried into the best four shilling tea ; it was certainly why he sighed as he crept up the stairs, which were always dark and always smelt of soft soap and blacking, to the meal for which he had no appetite.

"*I* wouldn't take it lying down—not if *I* was Colonel," said Mrs. Bobby, after five minutes of silence during which the "gal" had been bringing up dishes,



and trying not to look as if she knew her master was being sat on.

Colonel Bobby knew that this was the language of metaphor : what he was literally "taking" was toast and water, weak and tepid, and he was sitting, not lying down.

He could almost admit that his wife would have made a better Colonel than himself : it was her nature to command—she had a nose designed to signify it. Her back was stiffer than his, straighter, and half a yard longer : she was taller than he was, and, though portly, of a more compact build. He had never confessed it yet, but if taxed with it to-day he would have meekly agreed that he *was* fleshy, that his shoulders were too round, his legs too short, his circumference too long.

"Why," sneered Mrs. Bobby, "the very gal, as set them dishes on, knows as her master's had a set-down. It was wrote all o'er her face as plain as 'Bobby' is wrote o'er this shop-front."

"What can *I do*," demanded the unhappy Colonel, "if the Marquess won't have the address?"

"*Marquess*, indeed!" cried Mrs. Bobby with a bitter emphasis, as though his lordship's grade in the peerage were peculiarly offensive. "*Marquess*, indeed; I know very well what you *could* do, and what I *would* do, and what you *shall* do, and what (you mark my words else) all as attends Pisgah *will* do—I'd let 'em know I was not going to vote Conservative any more; it's beyond anything chapel folks should vote Conservative and get nought

but down-sets for their trouble. You'll find Pisgah'll vote Liberal enough next time—Rev. Puncher'll see to it. He always *did* say too much obeisance was made here to Gracechurch House, and it's only me as has restrained him from speaking up rank Liberal many's the time. I shan't urge him any more, pleadin', as I have, how my own full sister being Mrs. Grace's lady, and so great with her too, it would not look well for you and me to go again' 'the House' in politics."

On another occasion the Colonel might have hinted that, however deserving, Mrs. Bobby had no vote; to-day he was too deeply depressed: he did not even feel the moment auspicious for reminding his much better half that Gracechurch House was his best customer—worth any twenty other houses in the town: that Colonel Grace dealt with no London stores but got everything over his own counter.

As it fell out there was no need to say anything: a knock was heard at the private door downstairs, and 'Liza came quickly up holding a note in the corner of her apron.

"From Gracechurch House, ma'am," she explained, panting.

"For me?" suggested her mistress, "from Miss Growder?"

"No, ma'am. From Colonel Grace for master."

"Well, you needn't wait," said Mrs. Bobby sharply.

"The man's waiting—he don't know if there's to be any answer."

"Well, you wait outside."

Mrs. Bobby, though stern, was not inhuman, and

if the contents of the billet were to prove disquieting she preferred that no one but herself should behold her husband's depression under the blow.

"Had I better open it?" she asked when 'Liza had stepped out on the landing.

"If you like," said the humbled Colonel.

It did not take her long—the note was short and sweet: half a dozen good-natured lines from Colonel Grace to say that the Marquess had waived all scruples and would be delighted to accept the address, and to beg that Bobby would not trouble to send any reply.

"It's all right," Mrs. Bobby declared promptly. "No doubt Amelia spoke to Mrs. Grace and got her to talk the Colonel over and he put it strong to his lordship."

Mrs. Bobby laid no angry emphasis on the great man's style now.

"There's no answer, 'Liza. But here . . . give the man this." And she actually produced half-a-crown, which was far from being her common practice. "And 'Liza, bring up that fowl: it's roasted, and we may as well eat it as keep it for supper."

Bobby understood it all: roast fowl was not too good for him now. His round back stiffened a little, and his eyes were no longer downcast.

"Colonel Grace has acted handsome," he declared, "as he always does. And, Sarah, don't you let Rev. Puncher get talking again' Gracechurch House and the Conservative politics: fifty pounds a quarter Gracechurch House book is, and better. There's no sense in *driving* big customers to the London Stores."

"Well, Colonel," said his wife, "Rev. Puncher expects to be on the platform."

"On the platform ! Along with the Gracechurch House party, and the Rector, and . . ."

"Yes : on the platform, and Mrs. Puncher too, and Isabella Puncher : they've got new dresses on purpose," interposed Mrs. Bobby firmly. "You'll have to do it, and I'll just send round a note now in your name. You needn't trouble writing."

Colonel Bobby gasped and fidgeted.

"You'd niver *want* to see the Rector cocked up on the platform and your own Minister left out !" cried his lady, with a kindling eye.

"The Rector's chaplain o' the Regiment," he feebly reminded her.

"Well, and Rev. Puncher's *your* chaplain. Look here, Bobby, it *must* be. I *promised* Mrs. Puncher, and all Pisgah expects it." And Pisgah was not disappointed. On the platform, in a new broadcloth coat, was the Minister, at the appointed hour, with Mr. Bobby on his right, Mrs. Puncher on his left, and Isabella Puncher (a pretty girl in a pretty frock, to whom the Marquess was remarkably civil. While stepping up on to the platform his foot caught in her skirt, and he bowed and apologised most graciously.)

"There !" said Mrs. Bobby afterwards. "If Isabella Puncher wasn't the only lady the Marquess said a word to ! And he shook hands with the Minister just the same as with the Rector—and said he'd lately given ground for a Baptist Chapel at Fenny-Stanton."

If we *do* have the new porch at Pisgah, I daresay he'll put his name down."

But, as we have already seen, Lord and Lady Gracechurch went away, and the little town had to get on without Marquesses or Marchionesses for another twenty years or so; and we had gradually to accustom ourselves once more to our common air, after the rarefied atmosphere we had been breathing for two or three days.

One queer result of his lordship's visit was the odd behaviour of old Maddy Kickstone when he was gone. Maddy's figure was as familiar to everyone at Gracechurch as that of Sammy Pouter, the town crier: and both were wont to be attended in their movements through the streets by much the same ragamuffin crowd of idle boys and elderly little girls of nine or ten, carrying babies at apoplectic angles.

Maddy was older, if possible, than the crier, and had a more varied repertoire of expletives with which to express her feelings as to the nature and function of boys: she was a thin, threadbare creature, dressed winter and summer in the same piteous rags—whatever she did with such odds and ends of cast-off clothing charitable ladies might give her, it was obvious that she never wore them. Her hands were like claws, and her poor head looked like a windy rook's nest of two or three years ago. Her mouth was ever mumbling and chewing, and her fingers forever snatching at her ragged shawl, or at the air. Her eyes, cavernous under thick white brows, gleamed restlessly, and often fiercely: for Maddy took in

very ill part the gibes and ironical questions of the naughty children who formed her escort about the town.

Old Miss Dray declared that Maddy was a very pretty girl once, though flighty and queer even then. Her beauty had caused a scampish young house-painter to fall in love with her, and they were married ; but within three months of the wedding he disappeared, and it was said he had enlisted : anyway, he never showed his face again at Gracechurch, and Maddy was left alone and penniless. People tried to be kind to her, and offered her jobs of work, but she was too restless to stick to anything even for a day. If she came in to do a bit of "charing" of a morning, she would be off in an hour or two, and wander off to the mere, or out into the fields and woods. She seemed always to be searching for something, and it must have been small, for she would kick up every stone she came across, as if expecting to find it hidden there. Some said it was her wedding-ring she was trying to find—for the ring disappeared when her husband disappeared, and it was commonly supposed he had stolen it. Whatever it was, Maddy never found it, but went on day after day, year after year, strolling hither and thither, peering about, snatching at leaves of low-branching trees, plucking at the air, and kicking up the stones everywhere—that was, of course, why they called her Maddy Kickstone. Most of us thought she was called "Maddy" simply because she was crazy, though Miss Dray told my mother that she fancied it might

really be her name, since she had been known as Maddy always.

When the workmen were busy taking down the triumphal arches and Venetian masts, Maddy showed considerable annoyance.

"I'm not gone yet," she complained, "and I've given no orders to have them taken down."

The men laughed and went on with their work, though she marked her displeasure by throwing small stones at them. It was odd that though her language was often terrible, her accent was not vulgar, and her voice, shrill as it was, had no common twang or burr in it. When she got tired of pelting the men with gravel, she busied herself collecting armfuls of the fading evergreens that had adorned the masts and arches, and with these she wandered away out of the town. She had contrived to steal a flag as well, and this she had rolled up tight and hidden among the laurels and ivy. It happened to be one on which the arms of Grace—a black swan on a white ground—were woven into the bunting.

The path she took led her along the mere-side to a patch of wooded ground, and here she stopped, for if she had gone on a hundred yards the workhouse would have been in sight, and Maddy would never go where she could see it. One very cold winter they had caught her, and forced her to go into the house—fearing she would starve to death if left to herself, or be found frozen under a hedge or a haystack. For a few days Maddy had had the workhouse by the ears : then, to the equal relief of master and paupers, she had escaped,

climbing over a very high wall by means of a pear-tree trained against it.

When Maddy found that her tiresome escort of ne'er-do-well urchins had dropped off, for she was too common a sight to be worth following out of town, she sat herself down on the grass and began to look over her booty. But even now, she could not sit still : espying a stone, perhaps as big as a penny loaf, six or seven feet away, she threw her bundle aside and scrambled up to go and kick it over.

“ ‘Not there : not there, my child,’ ” she sang out, to the tune of a hymn she had learned years ago.

Then she came back to her seat on the turf, and set to work making wreaths and garlands of her evergreens. The flag she unrolled and spread like an awning on two low boughs, the wreaths she hung up on twigs, and then gathered herself a nosegay of dandelions (Lady Gracechurch had carried a bouquet). Thus equipped, poor Maddy assumed a noble and gracious air of serene condescension, and took her stand under the flag ; she stood still there a long time, bowing and curtsying to an imaginary succession of gentlemen and ladies being presented to her. She had never gone on doing the same thing for so long a time together perhaps in all her life. How long she might have continued had she not been interrupted, who can tell ? But interruption came : a man came by and saw her, and told her she had stolen the flag, and that he should go to Gracechurch House and tell of her. He did so ; but Colonel Grace only laughed and said the flag was giving her more pleasure than it had ever



given to Lord Gracechurch or anyone else, and after giving the fellow a shilling, bade him go, and let the old creature alone.

I suppose this came, somehow, to Maddy's ears : for she put on great airs, and nodded her head sagely, and laughed to herself.

"He's a very good man, the Colonel," she declared, with sublime patronage, "and knows how to treat ladies—though of a younger branch."

After that she *wore* her flag ; sometimes as a shawl—which gave her the appearance of carrying a huge black swan on her back—sometimes as a sort of overskirt.

Miss Broom was deeply scandalised. But old Miss Dray laughed and nodded nearly as sagely as Maddy.

One day they, Miss Dray and Maddy, met in a field not far from the end of Scotland Street, where the lady lived.

"Maddy," asked Miss Dray abruptly, "what's your name ?"

"Single or married ?"

"Well, single first : since we all start single, and some of us go on so."

"You're an old maid," said Maddy, with condescension. "I wish I was. Madeline Grace was my maiden name : Madeline Fife my married name afterwards. Kickstone is merely a title. Titles and surnames are not the same, you know. Old maids have no titles, but can do their duty in that state of life to which Lord Gracechurch calls them. *Good* afternoon. I've a reception to attend. You haven't happened to pick up a ring, have you ?"

There was a stone close to Miss Dray's foot, and

Maddy skipped forward and gave it a kick, crying eagerly.

"If it's there, it's *my* ring, mind ! Beg your pardon, if I pushed you—but it's a ring an old maid could have no use for . . ."

She bounced past Miss Dray and hurried off mincingly.

This was in winter time, and a hard frost came that night, followed by another and another, on the two nights that succeeded. Colonel Grace happened to meet Maddy, and noticed how piteously thin and inadequate was her clothing : he stopped and tried to induce her to promise she would sleep within doors, and get herself warmer raiment. But she pushed aside the money he offered, saying grandly :

"It's hard, when one has so many houses, to choose between them. What with Gracechurch Hall (tho' it's burned down), and Castle Grace, and Grace-Dieu Court, I never can make up my mind. But I'm obliged by your homage. *Good* afternoon, Colonel. When we meet—in higher circles, the very highest (she pointed one clutching finger upward), I'll give you the kindest recommendations—and introductions. The very gates are pearls. *Good* afternoon."

She sauntered away, graciously ; and the kind-hearted Colonel went there and then to Mrs. Grace, to see if nothing could be done for poor Maddy. She, meanwhile, strolled on and came to the place by the mere-side where she had held her first reception, and prepared to hold another. From the roots of the trees she picked trails of ivy and made garlands

of them, to hang on the low bows near her flag—very dirty and draggled now. When all was ready, she took up her station as before, and began her long series of condescending bows and curtseys. But again there was an interruption. Slouching towards the workhouse a battered tramp, so old and rheumatic he could scarce move his weary limbs along, came shambling under the naked trees and espied her at her uncanny play.

Maddy bowed and simpered at him with the kindest encouragement, but he only stood still and stared.

“Come up !” she called out. “You’re not a tenant, but you can be presented——”

And even while she spoke, she caught sight of a biggish stone that someone had flung out on to the ice to see how thick it was.

“Excuse me ! I’ll come back, and you can be presented,” Maddy called out, and ran towards the mere.

“Hi ! stop !” shouted the tramp. “It won’t bear. I tried——”

But Maddy was already on the ice, and it did bear her thin weight. To do him justice the tramp made after her. He was almost near enough to catch her by her rotten shawl, when she gave a fierce kick at the stone, and cried out :

“There ! I’ve found the ring.”

And the ice broke.

Poor Maddy was drowned ; but the tramp was not. At the inquest, the first question put to him was :

“What is your name and calling ?”

“James Fife : formerly a soldier——”

## CHAPTER VI

### NANDY'S CHILD

IN the middle of Gracechurch was the Market Place, shaped like a flat-iron : three streets led into it, and a fourth might be said to run out of it : High Street, where the shops were, and the Gracechurch Arms (when I first saw that correct and sedate hotel, I looked in vain for any limbs in the sign, which only showed a shield with coronet and supporters) : Scotland Street, and Swine Market Street, usually known as Market Street only, for the sake of euphony : at the pointed end of the flat-iron, Cross Street straggled away into the country. The inhabitants of this last were poor, and rather noisy of Saturday nights, when the public-houses had closed : there were no genteel houses in it, though one made a smug pretence of aspirations that way, and was inhabited by a brewer.

At the flat end of the Market Place was the Town Hall, adjoining which, in a grim, grey stone house, lived that Miss Toms who was, in a dry, unconvivial fashion, boon companion or bosom-friend of Miss Harriet Dray. Miss Toms had biggish rooms in her house and a nice garden at the back, but on Tuesdays she sat in her dining-room to see all that went forward in the market.

In Market Street there were no genteel houses, but at the top of it, where it joined Alder-Gate, one was faced by the long, rather low, quite dignified residence of the Foston family—who kept an Establishment for Young Gentlemen. And further down Alder-Gate lived Lawyer Gingham: in fact nearly the whole street was taken up by these two houses and their high garden walls. Alder-Gate, at the top end, led into Chapel Street, where Mrs. Thorn lived.

In the first of these papers it was mentioned that we had two of each sort of tradesman, but there were not two greengrocers or fruiterers—there was not one. Such a calling would have struck us as perfectly meaningless and uncalled for: almost everyone had a large garden, and we, who lived in lodgings and had none, were never in want of garden produce.

Our first callers had not left us an hour before a big basket arrived full of summer vegetables, and our next sent round a quantity of fruit—a sort of substitute for visiting-cards, little used at Gracechurch, which we found highly convenient and practical.

Mrs. Thorn did not call at all in the first instance: but smiled and bowed with cordial good-will, as we came out of church on perhaps our third or fourth Sunday, and on Monday sent a splendid basket of mulberries, huge plums and nectarines “for the young gentlemen.”

I was despatched with a note of thanks from my mother, and was ushered into the very drawing-room that had, nearly thirty years before, been the scene

of Miss Thorn's escapade with the china. It was a pretty room full of pretty things, but evidently no longer much in use. Beside the piano stood a "Canterbury" holding all the songs Lettice Thorn had brought home from school at Graceminster : over it hung a water-portrait of the girl, showing a pretty, graceful figure and a lovely face, refined and over delicate. Outside was the big mulberry-tree, covered with dark ruby fruit and throwing a cool green shade into the room.

Presently Mrs. Thorn came in : a handsome woman still, not much more than fifty years of age, but with her life all behind her, save for one sad link to it—and that breaking fast. Ferdinando was dead ; Lettice was dead ; only her son, another Ferdinando, was left to her, and she knew he would not be left much longer. Her manner was not melancholy, but cheerfully grave : death could never rob her of all that life had given.

"Eh, my dear," she said, shaking hands without kissing me, for which I at once esteemed her highly. "Your Mamma should never have troubled writing. If she's passing any time let her step in—that'd be much better. You tell her. She should never waste ink thanking for the bits of things I may take in my head to send you young gentlemen. I know what boys like—it's not so long since my lad was a boy : and there's no one here but me and him. Why should the fruit rot on the trees ? and it's too good for the throstles and blackbirds, greedy things, as get plenty with what drops on the ground. Come

in the other room. . . Nandy and me never sit here : he doesn't like visitors to find him." She held the door open and walked before me, to show the way, across the hall to another open door. At the end of the hall was the kitchen, and that door could not have been shut either, for a voice was heard thence loudly declaring, "Half-past one and a cloudy night. We won't go home till morning. How do you do, how do you do, do, DO?"

"That's Polly," explained Mrs. Thorn. "Jane will cover him up with a cloth if he won't go home till morning much longer. . . . Nandy, here's a visitor."

Having heard that her son disliked visitors I felt shy of being forced upon him, but he seemed glad to see me.

The room was rather dark, for the trees grew close to the window, and the blind was half drawn : it was not so pretty as the drawing-room, though comfortable and well furnished. Nandy Thorn sat back in the deepest shadow, and, though he held out a thin, very white hand, he did not get up to greet me. I thought, at first, this was merely because so much ceremony was not necessary towards a very little boy : but the truth was he could scarcely move. I suppose he was about six or seven and twenty, and there was an oil portrait over his head, which could only have been painted three or four years earlier, that showed what a handsome, graceful young man he had been. He was very like his sister then, though with dark hair, and large soft dark eyes, and a rich russet-brown skin. Now all beauty was gone : almost everything was gone.

He was paralysed from the waist downwards, and a terrible disease had destroyed the comeliness of his face.

"I've been telling Master John," his mother said, when she had sat down very near her son, that his Mamma is not to trouble sending notes to thank for fruits and things. I know what boys like : and Jane said to me this morning, 'It's scandalous the way the birds are getting all the mulberries : and the warsps are beginnin' on the wall-fruit.' So I said, 'Why not send them to Mrs. Ayscough ? her three boys 'll like 'em just as well as the warsps, and not sting us.' So I just sent the little maid round with them, and there's nothing to say 'Thank you' for. Is there, Nandy ?"

"Not at all—as you put it, Mother," the young man answered, laughing.

"Well, there's no use putting it anyway but the truth. That chair's rather high for your legs, my dear ; you'd be easier on the stool there ; Nandy sat in it to learn his letters. His legs were short at first, but he shot up like sparrowgrass after. And, my dear, just you bring your brothers round of a half-holiday, and you can eat as much as you like off the trees, and take as much home as you care to carry. I daresay your Mamma 'd like to make preserves of some : indeed we've more jam now in the store-room than *we* shall ever eat, and I'll ask your Ma's leave to send a pot round."

(A pot proved to be several relays of a dozen pots each time.)

"And, my dear ; can you play at puzzles ? We've all Nandy's and my poor girl's : Nandy and me don't



play puzzles now ; you'd better have them. You shall take one to-day ; and another next time you come."

Mrs. Thorn arose and went away upstairs, leaving her son and me alone. We did not say much, but became, somehow, very good friends.

Once he sighed a very quiet sigh, scarcely audible, and I knew, as well as if he had said so, that he was wishing he could be a little boy of six again, sitting on my stool, with his life in front of him, instead of all its short, twisted length tangled behind him.

I did not dare to move, hardly durst breathe lest I too should sigh and he should hear me ; there was a smart in my eyes and a clutch in my small throat. When the hot little tear crept down my cheek I did not try to wipe it off, for the light was at my back, and it was so dusk in the room it seemed impossible he could know.

"Never mind, Johnnie," he said in a quiet, patient voice.

We could hear his mother moving in the room above. She was opening cupboards filled with relics of her two children ; little bits of precious finery of the girl's, toys and games, and first reports from school of the clever, handsome boy.

When she came down again her bright black eyes were brighter than ever : but if she had been sighing, her sighs were all locked away in the drawers with the fans and ribbons and cricket-balls.

"Here's one apiece for you—there's three of you, I know all about it, you see," she said, and indeed her arms were full. "In church I sit just behind you :

and it's a sermon to watch your Mamma that can't hear a word of any of it. Here's your puzzle—it was Lettice's: all the Kings of England in pieces, and you've got to fit them together. That'll learn you your dates: 'A thousand and sixty-six, and Harold all in a fix,' 'William and Mary like oranges fine, sixteen hundred and eighty-nine': that's how I learned 'em, helping my poor girl to put them together, long ago."

There were presents for my brothers too, suited to their robuster strength and somewhat riper age.

"Don't you mind?" I whispered to Nandy: for they had all been his.

"Nandy mind! Not he. Why he hasn't seen 'em many a long year, and never knew I had them."

Nandy laughed and assured me with unmistakable heartiness that he was glad someone should have the things to play with.

"There's dozens more," Mrs. Thorn went on, "and you shall have 'em all, as I bring myself to part with 'em: and as I find them, for when I go rummaging I come across many things I'd forgotten myself."

That was the beginning of a long and very kind friendship between Mrs. Thorn and us. Of course our mother, after her message, went to see her, and Nandy, at her second visit, asked if she would mind coming in to where he sat. He had been the grand tour, and could talk well about it: of his own ruined health he never spoke, nor did his mother. Long afterwards I heard someone say that he had brought his death on himself: at all events he took his punishment without complaint. No one could have been

more patient : never once till the end did he murmur or grumble. In that darkened room he sat, while the colder shadows of death closed in, with a quiet courage that was almost cheerful.

Once, when I found him alone, his mother having gone out for her daily short walk, we sat almost silent, as was our way, not at all embarrassed because we had so little to say.

"Johnnie," he said at last with a little laugh, "did you say your prayers this morning?"

"I forget. I jumped out of bed because the volunteers were going by on a march and I heard the band : then I scrambled on my clothes and went after them. When I came back I know I washed myself—but I expect I forgot my prayers."

"Say them now."

I shut my eyes and clasped my hands and knelt against his chair.

" 'Gentle Jesus Meek and Mild  
Look on me a little child.' "

"Say," he whispered, " 'Make me like a little child.' "

I said it and went on :

" 'Pity Mine and Pity Me,  
Look on my simplicity.' "

"Go on."

"Why don't you say it?"

"I want you to."

So I went on. When the short childish prayers

were finished, I sat still and silent by his side, watching the flicker of the fire, for Nandy's last summer was gone now, and winter was chill outside. His thin hands clasped the arms of the chair, in which he sat stooping forward, his great gaunt eyes reflecting the flames.

"Are you in pain?" I asked presently, for he moved uneasily.

"No," he answered, meaning no more than usual, for he was always in almost intolerable pain.

I suppose he fidgeted as people do who want to speak and find it hard to speak.

"Who taught you . . . ?" he asked at last.

"Taught me what?"

"To love—Him."

"My mother."

"Ah," he said in his quiet voice, "it is easy to love those one has never injured."

He leant a little further forward, and was silent for a moment, then went on :

"That's the mischief, Johnnie : to love when one *has* injured. I never knew anyone who could go on loving someone he had done badly to. Fellows have done me bad turns and I would have been as glad as ever to go on being friends, but they couldn't stand it. Even now I don't feel that I am hated : only that it is hard for me to love . . . that fellow for whom the fatted calf was killed didn't care as much for his father as his father cared for him."

On the sideboard, among the silver cups he had won at school and college for rowing, the old clock, that had ticked out his grandfather's life and his

father's, was with a dozing deliberation ticking out the seconds still, as good at its business now as it was eighty or ninety years ago when it was made : a handsome French *pendule* of tortoiseshell and brass marqueterie, with a sun engraved in the domed brass top, over the dial, shining down on a flower that lifted its face to him—" *Ainsi, mon Ame*" for posy : "Thus, O my soul."

Nandy's eyes were always bent on the flicker of the throbbing fire : he talked to it and let me overhear. I guessed then that in his long hours here, when his mother was out in the kitchen making dainty things to tempt his appetite, he had grown used to sit and think of what he never before spoke of to me.

"In the good books," he said, not fretfully but with a plain truthfulness, "they urge how easy it must be to love One who has done us nothing but good. They find it so—the good folk who write them—because they have done Him no harm. . . ."

Did he quite forget that his listener was a child of scarcely seven years old ? The child could only creep a tiny hand towards one of his and touch it shyly. Presently he seemed to doze, and his breathing was like the regular slow breathing of one who slept.

Outside the trees and shrubs looked black in the fading winter light. But the snow began to flutter down and they drew over their blackness a shining white veil. . . . When Nandy awoke they were all quite covered with it.

"So it is only *your* hand," he said in his low tone that was never quite sad.

"Yes : only mine."

"I fell asleep, I suppose, looking at it : thinking of it. But all the time I saw a hand there, and felt it ; a child's too. But Johnnie. . . ."

"What, Nandy ?"

"There was a scar on it : all along the back. But it pressed on mine as yours does."

The Christmas evergreens were still up in our church ; and a text my mother had painted, with holly for a border, studded with red drops : and it was not hard for me to think of the Little Child that leads us.

That was the only time Nandy ever spoke to me of what I am sure he thought about continually.

He lived on till winter was almost over, and the black spring was half-ready to appear with blustering smiles that had not much warmth or cheer in them, and as frequent gusts of noisy tears.

Then, one day when I went to see him, his place near the fire was empty, and I found his mother there alone. She did not move or look at me, but kept her eyes on the red heart of the fire, and held my hand, gently chafing it, for it was cold, between hers.

I stood by her side saying nothing.

"Nandy will not come down any more," she said.

"Is he too ill ?"

"No, Johnnie. His illness is over . . . it seemed, an hour or two ago, as if his sufferings might go on a long while. About three o'clock he said he had no more pain, and slipped off into an easy sleep. When he woke he said the child had been again—he spoke

often lately of you, and always called you the child. But I suppose he had dreamed of you and thought you had come to see him. I felt sure you would come, and said: 'The child will soon be here. See if you can sleep a little more till he comes.' And he fell off again. When it was dusk I went to tell Jane not to bring the lamp, and when I got back . . . his sleep—was over."

A tear fell on my hand as she gently chafed it, and I knew that Nandy was dead.

"So you see," she went on quietly, "you were the last person he ever spoke of."

But I knew it was not so, and told her. She paused to listen, stopping in her soft chafing of my hand.

"Ah," she said presently, "he was such an innocent child: and had such a sweet heart."

"He had always a sweet heart," I told her, trying hard not to cry and trouble her.

"So he had. And he loved you to come better than anybody. 'I wish the child would come again,' I've often heard him say as he dozed." Then she paused and pondered. "But you think he was not thinking of—you?" she said in a whisper.

"I am sure. . . ."

There was no sound for a while but the soft noise the fire made and the lazy ticking of the clock.

"Lettice died on what was to have been her wedding-day," the mother went on presently. "And that was Nandy's birthday. To-day is *her* birthday—twenty-six to-day: each of them went on the other's birthday. So now they've both gone to their father—and he never could bear to be without them, speci-

ally on their birthdays and that. He was taken up with them, and they with him : you see I was different."

She fell musing again, and to chafing my hand that was quite warm now.

"When they were little they were bold, as children will be sometimes : and would check me for saying things wrong—it put their father about finely, but I never minded. I was only glad they should be gentry and talk as they should : but ah, if they had been as strong as me ! I doubt gentry are not so robust as working people. I never ailed an hour in my life, and am strong enough now to live another thirty years—but they were delicate like their father : and he and they liked all the same things—they loved oysters and game, and I could never abide them : folks like the things to eat they had to eat when they were children. 'Taters and buttermilk I liked better than anything : though I could cook all the things they fancied better than any cook we ever had—and there's no one now left to cook anything for."

Thereat she broke down, and sobbed, shaking her head from side to side, and letting the tears flow unheeded.

"Oh, Johnnie, Johnnie ! What does the Lord fancy I'm to be doing now !" she moaned. "I'd liever be a working woman and have my bread to get. When Mr. Thorn was taken, I'd no call to think and fret for myself, there was the boy and girl to comfort and do for. And when my girl went, the lad wanted double comfort, and soon needed me more than either his father or sister ever needed me. But now



there's only me, and everything I want, and more, without striving for it—eh, Johnnie, it's poor work when there's none but yourself to do a thing for."

She had never been a weeping woman, and even now her tears soon ceased. She had stopped sobbing before she stopped speaking.

"I doubt it's a sin talking like that," she said, pulling herself up roughly, "and might bring a judgment—not as I can see what it could be now : and I do hope the Lord'll be patient this one night. It's never been my way to cry out. And He had a mother Himself ; I do trust He'll understand."

She heard a sound upstairs, and rose to her feet, firmly and gently.

"I'm going up again now," she said, "and you must go home. You'll tell your mother : and maybe she'll step round to-morrow—I could see *her* : but not many others. Ah, my poor lad—I'll not ask you to see *him* : my girl looked so lovely I was proud as folk should look at her ; she lay in her wedding-clothes, and anyone could see what a bride she'd have been. But my poor lad, as was handsomer far than his sister—I couldn't bear anyone should see what's left of him. You never saw him, not *him* ; and yet you loved him—*he* knew you didn't shrink from the sight of him. He loved you for it : and so I'll love you for it, better than any child that wasn't my own. 'The Child doesn't shrink off from me,' he'd say, many's the time. 'Not likely,' I'd say ; and only this last morning (as I never thought was to be the last) he said it again : 'It's odd I can bear the Child seeing me, when I can bear no man,'

he said : and a minute or two after : 'The Child can bear to look at me. I used to think He couldn't. I can bear to have Him see me, Mother.' "

I knew well that Nandy meant the other Child, to whose Innocence his own lost innocence turned with a sure but strange instinct.

"Yes," his mother went on, leaning one hand on the chimney-piece, and gazing down into the fire. "Yes : my poor lad loved you, Johnnie, and he was not one to care for many folks, or strangers. The day you came first, I'd a pretty work persuading him to let me bring you in here—I took the notion, of a suddint like, as it would do him good to have some young happy creature nigh him—but he held out at first, as it wasn't fit. As time went on, and I knew he and you were great, I reminded him. Last night I said to him : 'Well, you love the child, and it's no use saying you don't.' 'Yes. I thought I couldn't,' says he (you'll not mind me telling you). 'I thought I couldn't,' he said. 'There was too much difference. It didn't seem fair. But I can't help it. It's His own doing.' "

His own doing—I knew that, not mine.

As I ran home, the cold March clouds were lightening themselves, and the early night was all black and white, but there was more white than black, for the snow was falling fast—the last snow of that long bleak winter. Into that whiteness Nandy's wasted body was laid three days after : and the Child with the scarred hand, who had broken down the last shy reserve of a half-noble reluctance, knows whether Nandy's soul was white or no at last.

## CHAPTER VII

### IN PARTIBUS

NEARLY opposite Gracechurch House, at the entrance of the town from the Rentminster Road, and facing the high retaining wall of the churchyard, lived the Misses Gibbs. Of course there were four of them, but Miss Ethel only came on holiday visits to Gracechurch, for she lived in Germany, as governess in some noble family. Miss Gibbs, Miss Patricia, and Miss Florence kept a school. And it was from Miss Patricia (in the dining-room window, while one or other of the "young ladies" practised scales) that the present writer learned to read—out of a flat green and gold volume called *Reading Without Tears*. Miss Patricia was probably about thirty then, and was tall, with fine eyes and a good deal of manner: her walk was considered striking, and her nose maintained the impression. She could have been strict if necessary, but then she never allowed it to be necessary: she was too decisive. When she walked to her table in the schoolroom, it was with the air of saying: "Now, young ladies! we have come here to learn; of course we shall do it." And they did it. She was really an excellent teacher, not at all anxious to trap her pupils into displaying their

ignorance, but quietly determined to turn whatever ignorance they had into a reasonable amount of knowledge. The young ladies generally stayed a good while, and there was no need to cram them ; but Miss Patricia had no idea of wasting time.

Having always been rather delicate I was backward, and was nearly seven years old before I could read well ; but long before I was eight I was reading continually, and have never stopped since.

Miss Patricia's handbooks to knowledge were, I fancy, old-fashioned ; they would be considered antediluvian now. Mrs. Markham introduced us to English History, and *Mangnall's Questions* to things in general. A bird's-eye view of Europe and the world was afforded by a book called *Near and Far*, from which I learned that the French were a frivolous nation, fond of revolutions and dress, and addicted to omelettes : that Spain is a country steeped in idolatry and ignorance, entirely devoted to garlic, guitars, and image-worship : that England, owing to the Reformation, is foremost in wealth and commerce—a land of Contentment where Law and Liberty walk hand-in-hand.

Miss Patricia also taught me to write, with repeated but ineffectual insistence on the great principles that the top of the pen should ever point to the shoulder, that upstrokes must be thin and downstrokes thick. The copy-books took a rather unfair advantage in the advertisement of other principles—some of which hung partly in suspense during the learner's period of very large type : thus that

*Contentment is the bes*

H

which made me suppose Thebes and complete satisfaction to be synonymous, till, on a later page, the lettering grew smaller, and I discovered that *Contentment is the best wealth*.

Perceiving in her pupil a hasty and literal tendency, Miss Patricia forestalled any misapprehension as to the force of the maxim, "God helps those who help themselves," by explaining that it had nothing to do with meal-times, "which would be," she observed, "bad manners." Good manners were carefully inculcated; and France, in spite of omelettes and revolutions, being regarded as the land of politeness, the young ladies were supposed to express their wishes at table in the language of that country: thus Tillie Marsh, if she wanted more bread and butter, would say to Jessie Briggs, by whom the plate stood: "Pass the tartines, *s'il vous plaît*."

When I could read quite well Miss Gibbs made me a present of a small, well-bound Bible, with my name illuminated inside by Miss Patricia, who was the artist of the family. Having always a passion for reading every book from the very beginning, I demanded next day of Miss Patricia what an Accidental Star meant.

"There's no such thing," she replied, with decision.

"There must have been once," I insisted, slightly scandalised, "there's one at the beginning of the Bible." And I turned up the reference.

"'Occidental,' my dear, 'Occidental,'" said Miss Patricia. "It's a title of Queen Elizabeth's."

All the same I do not believe she knew what an

occidental star is, any more than I did ; and, as she was not our Bible teacher, I did not press the point.

Miss Gibbs taught us Scripture, and was currently believed to have read the whole Bible through from "the first of Genesis" (which sounded like a day of the month) to the last of Revelation every year of her life. She knew it almost by heart, and would cheerfully have died for the verbal inspiration of every chapter-heading and the numeration of the verses. She did not, I suppose, believe it to have been written in English : and was, I know, horrified to perceive that Tillie Marsh imagined James I had compiled it from materials bequeathed to him by Queen Elizabeth. But she hated any reminder of the "original Hebrew" or "original Greek," and attributed the known laxity of foreign nations, not so much to their being Catholic as to their possessing the Scriptures in mere translations from the English version.

It may be supposed from the text-books used by the Misses Gibbs that they were themselves bigoted ; but they were not. They merely promulgated the statements in these works as matters concerning which they could know nothing at first-hand, with as little personal feeling as Miss Patricia would tell us the distance from this earth to the sun. Had the astronomy-books declared then, which they did not, that Mars was intersected by canals, and from the canals inferred barges and bargemen, Miss Patricia would have conceived it probable that the bargees were rough and addicted to bad language, but would not have leant heavily on the hypothesis, or condemned the poor fellows, unheard,

with any Pharisaical harshness. Three better, more truly charitable ladies never taught school than the three Misses Gibbs. As for Miss Rachel, the eldest, though it would have astounded her to hear it, she was, in fact, cut out for a Contemplative Nun. The gentle Low Church spinster would have almost thought herself already in Heaven could her life have been all spent in uninterrupted contemplation of God, His word and His works, and in prayer for His wayward children.

Miss Patricia and Miss Florence showed their own goodness in no way better than in their respect for what they recognised as the higher goodness of their sister. I think it was because of this feeling of theirs that to Miss Gibbs was allotted the task of reproof. Miss Patricia could have scolded, Miss Florence could have reproached: but if any young lady required admonition—which really was seldom the case—they would say: “My dear, Miss Gibbs will see you in the drawing-room.” And to the drawing-room the culprit would descend.

As she tapped at the door I suspect she would rather have been back in the schoolroom, subjected to a short and sharp discharge of Miss Patricia’s small-arms, or Miss Florry’s louder artillery, than stand there waiting to go in and state her own case, for every delinquent was left to tell her own story, and sit still while Miss Gibbs would gently listen, more gently sigh, and most gently of all pause before speaking. When Miss Gibbs spoke at last it was never at much length, and no young lady ever repeated what she said: you

may be sure it was all very mild and very affectionate—but the same young lady seldom appeared soon in the drawing-room again.

Miss Gibbs spent most of her indoor hours in the drawing-room (largely furnished with woolwork), for she taught nothing in the school but Scripture ; and it was there she wrote to the parents, and received them when they came to bring or visit their daughters ; and there that she prepared her lessons in Bible-history and teaching. It was much the smartest room in the large, comfortable house, but I think the young ladies regarded it with more respectful awe than ease, and to their minds it always had a shady, coolish air, like a sort of side-chapel or chantry in a church. Miss Gibbs was the chaplain and female confessor of the establishment, and it was her sanctuary.

Miss Florry did not teach much in the school either, but there was no aloofness about her. She ordered meals and did the marketing, sorted the laundry before it went to wash and on its return, saw what stockings wanted mending, and whose pocket handkerchiefs had been put to illicit uses—as cleaning slates or dusting out desks. If Tillie Marsh had a snuffly cold (as she often had), Miss Florry prepared black-currant tea, or even elderberry wine negus in extreme cases, and administered it to the patient after she had tucked her up in bed. If Jessie Briggs, who was slightly addicted to boyish pursuits, cut her finger, Miss Florry fetched the diaculum plaister and applied it to the wound—not without warnings of accidents beyond her medical aid if pocket-knives were persisted in ; for visits to the



drawing-room were not "indicated" by such lapses as these. Black draught, Gregory's powder, and senna tea were all within her province, but, to do her justice, Miss Florry had not a heavy hand in their administration. Plenty of play and exercise out of school hours, fresh air in fine weather, and as noisy romps as they chose in wet, wholesome plain food in generous quantities, and early hours, were what Miss Florry favoured. It was even suspected that the black draught and senna tea had a slightly punitive significance ; some young ladies can be as greedy as some young gentlemen, and if a parcel from home coincided with biliousness in Annie Grubb, she concealed the circumstance or knew that Gregory's powder would follow.

Miss Florry was not esteemed so learned as Miss Patricia, and it was observed that the lessons she "took" were easier. If, however, she knew nothing of algebra, she was well enough up in addition and subtraction to make out the pupils' quarterly accounts and to check the weekly bills of the tradesmen.

One day two brothers of the Misses Gibbs swam into my ken—out of a dogcart which put up at the Black Swan. One was like Miss Patricia, except for a moustache, and evidently aware that he was good-looking. I daresay he was about eight-and-twenty ; and he dressed smartly and walked with Miss Patricia's air. This was Mr. Richard. Mr. John was older, and had less figure, or more, according as you look at it : he was, not to put too fine a point upon it, stoutish, like Miss Florry, and moved rather because he wished

to change his locality than to gratify the public. His waist had slipped up and did not seem likely to slip down again, but he did very well without it, and had a comfortable look of doing very nicely altogether. Both brothers had dark hair, but Mr. John's eyes were blue like Florry's, and there was no more to be said about his nose or mouth than about hers, whereas Richard had eyes as black as Miss Patricia's, and the same decisive nose and chin.

I think the visit was an unexpected pleasure : Edith Larkom was practising a remarkably moonlight sonata in the drawing-room, Polly Wilkins was scaling monotonous heights in the dining-room ; Miss Gibbs had gone to " Litany," for it was Friday morning ; and Miss Florry had gone to expose the inferior quality of a sirloin to the butcher : there was no one but Miss Patricia to receive the gentlemen, and they *were* gentlemen, and incompatible with Edith Larkom in the drawing-room, or even Polly Wilkins in the dining-room.

" Stop a minute, Eliza," Miss Patricia called out over the banisters, " you needn't open the door yet. . . ." Then, when she had reached the dining-room door : " You have practised half an hour, my dear, and you needn't mind the other quarter. Just run upstairs." And Polly, nothing loth, gathered up her music and scrambled away with alacrity.

When Eliza had received licence to open the door she was confronted with *three* gentlemen on the step, the youngest of whom slipped in without awaiting any special invitation, for the present writer had arrived

for an arithmetic lesson. The sight of him suggested an idea to Miss Patricia, and she bade him just stay in the hall a minute.

"Well, and how are you both?" she said to her brothers, who were now also inside. She was glad to see them in spite of unexpectedness and difficulties of detail, and, though she did not allow herself to be kissed before Eliza, and with Polly Wilkins peeping over the banisters, her greeting was affectionate.

She took them into the dining-room and led me in with them.

"This is Johnnie," she observed, "my own particular pupil, and these, my dear, are Mr. John and Mr. Richard, our brothers. . . . Why didn't you say you were coming? Rachel and Florry are both out, and I must go back to my class. I'll tell you what. Johnnie shall have a holiday off his arithmetic, and he shall take you both for a walk till twelve, then my classes will be over, and Rachel and Florry will be in too."

So, for a walk we went, and I perceived, with annoyance, that the two gentlemen thought their small companion "old-fashioned." Not to be considered old-fashioned was his constant desire. Apparently they did not, however, regard old-fashionedness as specially offensive, for they made a suggestion that quite took my breath away by its audacious novelty: "I'm sure, John," said Mr. Richard, "that we shall get no dinner out of our sisters: they can't let the young ladies go without theirs, and won't let us sit down at table with them. So we'll get something at the Black Swan, and Johnnie must come too."

Mr. John evidently approved ; and as soon as we had got back to the house, the proposal was laid before their three sisters, who, I felt sure, would instantly refuse to entertain it. But they did nothing of the kind.

"But, my dear, you must run home and ask your Mamma—with our brothers' compliments you know ; and if she allows you to, it will be a very good plan."

And so, for the first time in my life, I had a meal in an hotel, with two grown-up gentlemen for company. The cold beef seemed to taste different from any cold beef I had previously encountered ; and the pickled onions in a saucer (of a livid chilblain hue) were quite impressive : so was the plum-tart, with a knuckly roof, large enough for a party of twenty ; and even the cheese, that made its presence felt as soon as the china lid was off, had a gentlemanly suggestion that I felt to be stimulating. The waiter appeared to think me about the same age as the other John, and asked nonchalantly what I would please to drink, Mr. Richard catching his eye and suggesting lemonade. He refused to have his eye caught again, and brought three bottles of it, which he opened with the air of believing them to be champagne—as dexterously twisting napkins round their necks as if he had been a hangman.

"So," observed Mr. John, when the waiter had left us to our fruit (which partook in character of the unusualness of the whole feast and did not taste in the least as if it had ever grown in a garden, but had a rakish flavour as if it had sat up all night with the cheese) ; "so, Johnnie, you're enrolled among our sisters' young ladies ?"

Mr. Richard did not seem to think this remark fortunate, and cut in :

"Not at all. Our sister, Patricia, is his private tutor. She was mine once—when I was ten and she was about twelve : but I daresay she's not so strict with Johnnie. She used to make me stand in the corner if I made mistakes—till she found that I wrote 'Patricia is horid' on the wall-paper, with one 'r' and a stump of pencil she had given me in reward for knowing all the kings and their dates down to Charles I."

"Why didn't you know 'em down to Queen Victoria?" demanded his brother, whose mind was discursive.

"Because I wouldn't learn Cromwell, as he wasn't a king, and Patricia would not let me learn the others till I would say him too."

"Did she find out what you wrote on the wall?" I inquired, with interest.

"Yes; and she made me write out a hundred times : 'Patricia is not horrid,' with the proper number of 'r's' in it."

"I wouldn't have written it," said Mr. John.

"Oh, yes, you would," retorted his brother, with conviction; and I agreed with him.

"You see," Mr. Richard went on, "John is a good bit older than me . . ."

"Oh come!" expostulated John.

"Eight years older than me," Mr. Richard went on, unmoved, "and had his first lessons from our sister Rachel : he and Florry; and they imposed on

her. They wouldn't have imposed on Patricia if they had been *my* age."

"You'll make Johnnie think me quite elderly," grumbled Mr. John, with a shake of his waistcoat, as if his waist was still there somewhere, and only had to be shaken into sight.

To tell the truth I thought so already—I daresay Mr. John might be then about seven-and-thirty.

When we went back to their sisters we found the young ladies had been given a mitigated half-holiday—that is, they had all been sent out walking with Fräulein till tea-time. *We* were to have tea in the drawing-room, after which the gentlemen were clearly expected to conclude their visit.

"But we'll only go on one condition," said Mr. John.

"Heyday! Conditions!" cried Miss Patricia. "Conditions are for ladies, I think."

"We'll only go," persisted the good-natured John, "if Johnnie goes with us."

I gasped with excitement. The world seemed opening its doors with a suddenness that took my breath away.

"Perhaps Johnnie wouldn't care to go," suggested Miss Florry.

"Look at him!" said Mr. John. And they all did look.

"Well," said Miss Patricia, "if his Mamma will trust him to you. . . ." And the kind creature at once declared that she and I should go and see.

The permission was given, and my mother packed

a little bag for me, only too much pleased that any change and pleasure should come in my way : it was delightfully important to have luggage of one's own, but I felt half guilty at wanting so much to go.

When the dogcart came to the door and I was fitted in between the two gentlemen, with my tiny valise under the seat, I waved my hand encouragingly to my mother on the doorstep, as though I were starting for Central Africa or Nova Zembla with every confidence as to surviving the perils of those adventurous regions.

It was surprising how different everything looked—to this day I find that even the most familiar scenes, through which one is in the constant habit of walking, look strange and slightly unreal, or pictorial, when seen from the window of a railway carriage. Mr. Timmis, of the Black Swan, whom I had esteemed tallish till now, looked almost short as he stood on the pavement to watch us go ; and the top of his head proved to have very little hair on it. Three boys playing hop-scotch in front of the cobbler's open window, regardless of his feeble protestations of territorial rights to object, had not a bit the air of ordinary boys. The whole street, the whole town, had acquired a remoteness that seemed quite foreign.

"It's a rum little one-horse sort of place," observed Mr. John, with the air of a Londoner.

"Driving four-in-hand like this," said his brother, slightly touching with his whip the single cob in front

of him, "we naturally don't think much of one-horse concerns."

I certainly liked Mr. Richard best, though Mr. John was at least equally good-natured.

Out in the country things looked less abnormal, because they were slightly less familiar: when they ceased to be familiar they were only more interesting.

"We're in Wales now," remarked Mr. Richard, about four miles out of Gracechurch, and I felt that I was "abroad." When we passed a post-office I should have liked to get down and drop a short letter into it, to inform my mother I was quite well, and address it to her at "Gracechurch, England."

I could have wished that the scenery had been more unmistakably foreign. It was beautiful, but not at all unlike that on the other, the English, side of Gracechurch. After a while, as we drew near the mining-town of Llanberwyn, it became rather less beautiful, and the cottages were really not at all like those at home. They stood in rows, like rejected samples of streets, along the roadside, and had no gardens in front, and were built of a gloomy sort of stone, and had blackish slate roofs. The men lounging in front of them were grimy with coal-dust, and mostly had black hair, and they sought matter for criticism in the appearance of strangers like ourselves. At Gracechurch one merely stared at strangers in a silence that was not disparaging.

Llanberwyn was not, apparently, a one-horse place: it had, as night fell, a certain raffish liveliness. The streets were rather coaly, and the shops were ugly,



but they and the frequent gin-shops were lighted up quite garishly, and there was a theatre with a jostling crowd outside it waiting for the doors to open. We drove right through the town, and it had so many streets that it took over ten minutes to do so ; but, though evidently four or five times as big as Gracechurch, I saw no gentlemen's houses like those at home. There was a new church built of staring red brick, which must have been out of sheer contentiousness, since all the houses were of stone, and made it look more nearly related to the many chapels, also of red brick, than was, as I felt, decorous. There was no quiet churchyard, but only a paved court, with a good many bits of paper hopping about in it—for the night had grown windy—and a boys' school on one side the enclosure, a girls' school on the other, and the Miners' Rest opposite. The miners inside seemed to rest rather obstreperously.

"A good deal of life here," observed Mr. John cheerfully.

It may have been accident, but I seemed to receive a gentle nudge from Mr. Richard's elbow, which established a community of sentiment between us, not complimentary to the "life" of Llanberwyn.

"I rather thought," remarked Mr. John, five minutes later, when we were out in the country again, "you would have given the cob a rest and a feed there."

"Well, I didn't think of it," said Mr. Richard, and the matter rested. He was evidently, though the younger brother, the one who settled what should

be done. In the same dress and with a moustache, I felt sure Miss Patricia would have been exactly like him.

Mr. John grew sleepy, and the red end of his cigar glowed less cheerfully ; but much redder lights began to spring up. Coal-mines became more and more frequent, and trees grew rarer. There were still fields, but, even by moonlight, they had not the quiet look of fields at home. Here and there monstrous mounds and terraces arose, black against the pale sky, sometimes aflame with wind-blown fires, and bestridden by horrible frames of woodwork like tangled groups of gibbets. When a mine was near the road one could see black figures of unearthly men moving about in the flare of fire and naphtha jets.

"So you see now, Johnnie," the other John observed drowsily, "where your coal comes from."

"Yes," I replied, wondering if one could do without it and burn only wood ; and hoping that my kind hosts did not actually reside at the mouth of a coal-pit.

They did not. Presently we turned off the main road and drove down a long hill for a mile or more, then up another for another mile—where Mr. Richard suggested that John should stretch his legs, which he did under protest. Then we plunged down into a woody valley, where it was as dark as if light had never been created, finally half-way up another hill, and in at a farm-house-looking sort of white gate, and—our journey was ended. ■

Trees seemed almost to fill up the valley, from the bottom of which there came the sound of water, and

trees grew close up to the house. The door stood open, and so did the windows ; in the light of them were some cows of a different pattern from ours at home—they seemed to be black, with white sheets thrown over them.

Here Mr. Richard, who was an engineer of some sort, lodged ; his brother being on a visit to him from Liverpool.

The landlady, a hardish-looking person, with smooth, flat, very black hair, red cheeks, and a nose like two dots, came into the hall to welcome us, and made me think of a penny doll. But she was very kind to me, and declared I must be tired to death after riding nineteen miles, poor lamb.

“Supper’s ready and waiting,” she said, “and Kezia shall bring it in while I get the little chintz-room ready—thank God, I’m not one as you can ever come on without clean sheets all aired. Then he shall go to his bed, poor lamb.”

It was an excellent supper, though it had not the gay bachelor flavour of the Black Swan meal ; and the room was not without distinctive features, for there was a convex looking-glass over the chimney-piece that made you look almost a mile away, and bent round, as if you had been reflected in the back of a bright spoon ; and there was a stuffed rabbit, in a gorse landscape, with two heads, “shot,” as an inscription in the corner stated, “by me, John Morgan, 29th February 1859”—but whether the rarity of the date accounted for the superfluity of heads there was nothing to show.

Kezia was, I thought, old for a housemaid, being apparently about sixty, of a bony build, like Mrs. Hornskull, and in the habit of saying, "So, then!" when she understood any order given her, and "Did you wish?" when she didn't. She wore clogs, and tumbled off them once when hurrying in with a silver christening mug for me to drink out of.

Mrs. Morgan arrived very soon after supper, and delivered, as though it were a message she had just received by telegraph, an announcement that it was time, in my Mamma's opinion, for me to go to bed. As I had been holding one eye open with a forefinger, and surveying the rabbit out of the other with a growing impression that he had three heads, I was not sorry; and off I went.

Mrs. Morgan had unpacked my small valise, and she now helped me to undress.

"Lor!" she said, "you'd feel strange with only two men to look after you: what does men know of children, poor lambs? And I'll be bound you'd never say your prayers, homely and comfortable like, with ne'er a woman's lap to say 'em up against."

At home over my bed there was a crucifix and a beautiful medallion head of our Lady. Over the bed here, in Mrs. Morgan's chintz-room, was a print of the Rev. John Wesley, in which the artist had relied a good deal on the famous squint to ensure a resemblance.

"Please," I observed hurriedly, at the end of my short prayers, "I want to put the miners in."

"Well, well," said Mrs. Morgan.

I

“‘And, please God make the men who get the coal as good as—as can be expected.’”

“Dear heart !” cried Mrs. Morgan.

When I was in bed, Mrs. Morgan lingered a little to light a rush-lamp that cast a slightly unearthly reflection on the ceiling.

“So you’d like to say a word for the miners,” she remarked.

“Yes, please,” I replied, wondering if there were anything objectionable in the idea.

“My brother was in the pit,” she went on hastily, “him whose christnin’ mug you drunk out of at supper. Uncle Laban, a well-to-do man in the grocery, give it him, being his godfather. For chapel-folks mostly go to church to be christened and buried and that. Uncle Laban *had* the cup : he was not one as would have bought it on purpose : and being a child’s he couldn’t use it, like ; he being a bachelor and all.”

“Is your brother in the pit now ?” I asked, as Mrs. Morgan paused here.

“Dear, no ! my dear. ‘His workin’ days are o’er, and he’s on the shinin’ shore.’ That’s where Japheth is. . . .”

She sat down on a box with a chintz cover by the bed, and stroked the quilt softly with her short, stubby hand.

“That’s where he is, so you needn’t mind my telling you. It won’t daunt you ?”

“No,” I said, as stoutly as I could.

“Well, Japheth was my only brother, and a year

younger. Mother had only him to work for her ; father being dead—else she didn't like his going to the pit. She'd been brought up tender, in a gentleman's family, and she couldn't abide to think of Japheth turning out rough and swearin', like the most of the pit-hands. But Japheth would go : knowing the wage was good, and us both depending on him. 'If I'm black outside the Lord'll have to look inside, mother,' he said. And black inside he never grew. Well, he went. And a stiddier lad there never was, nor cleaner-lived. All the same, mother and he fell out in a way of speaking. For he took up with a halum-scalum Irish lad called Patsy Conor, working in the same shift with Japheth, and through Patsy he got to know Patsy's priest, another Irishman, Father Creagh they called him. Mother couldn't abide either of them : Patsy was always larkin', and he teased our cat and mocked our minister (who had a gobbling way of talking in common life, though fine in the pulpit), and Japheth would do all on earth for the priest, so as I think mother was a bit jealous of him. Then Japheth turned Catholic out and right, and mother was as cross and put about as if he'd turned Italian, and gone round with an organ and a monkey. It seemed gall and wormwood to her even to hear Japheth praised, if it was Father Creagh that praised him. . . . Well, she's dead too now, and I'll be bound they're together and have made it all up. It's time you were asleep, and I'll finish up quick. There was an accident : one of the bad ones ; many men in Japheth's pit killed. But he

came up to the pit's mouth safe and not a scratch on him. Father Creagh was at the pit's mouth, among the women, cheering them up or trying to, and fine and glad he was to see our Japheth step out of the cage safe and sound. 'Has Patsy come up?' Japheth asked him, and asked everyone. But no one could give any account of Patsy, and Japheth said, 'Then I'll go down again,' and down he would go; and the priest said so must he, for there were others of his Irish fellows, besides Patsy, down in the pit. So Japheth and Father Creagh went down again, and, to cut it short, they found Patsy, with a beam across him, in one of the workings: the others of the rescue-party warned them to hold back and wait, but the priest said Death wouldn't wait and he couldn't, and went on—our Japheth with him. And the priest knelt down and heard the Irish lad his confession and that, and . . . and then the coal came down, and . . . and Patsy and the priest and our Japheth went up together. . . . So I thank you, kindly, my lamb, for the word you'd put in for the miners: and there's many of them, let alone our Japheth, 'as good as can be expected.'"

## CHAPTER VIII

### GRACECHURCH HOUSE

FOR many months after we went to live in Gracechurch I had no playfellows, as other children mostly have : my eldest brother was at Jacky Jackson's school, and, being four years older than me, chose his companions among the boys of his own age there : my second brother did not, then, live with us, but at Chester with our father's widowed mother, where we occasionally went to see him. Those visits, however, were not very cheerful, for the old lady only sent for us when she thought herself dying. I remember we were there on her eightieth birthday, and I laid out my entire capital in buying for her a pair of spectacles which I was so unlucky as to present with the only birthday greeting I knew.

“‘Many happy returns of the day, child’ !” she cried with fierce and indignant scorn. “Who on earth put such folly as *that* into your mouth ? How many returns of her birthday do you suppose a dying woman of fourscore years has to look for ? It’s a sad pity your mother has not taught you to take better care of your money.”—And so following.

My grandmother was, I believe, a handsome old woman ; but to me she appeared grimly ugly, sitting



up rigidly in her big bed, the brown "front" that in health adorned her scalp (with a velvet band across the forehead to hold it firm) now airing itself on the dressing-table and perched, with her cap atop of it, on a wooden dummy with a long leg, and seeming to be looking over the way into the Deanery garden in a sightless inhuman fashion. Her voice was by no means weak or subdued in spite of her announcement of approaching dissolution—indeed she did not die that time, nor the next either: and her keen dark-brown eyes were neither dimmed nor softened by age. Her hair was white, but her eyebrows were still dark, and had not lost the vigour of their frown.

"Eleanor, where's Fleetwood?" she proceeded to demand of her only unmarried daughter, "and where's poor Charlotte—and that man?"

My eldest aunt went to look for them. Out of a large family of sons and daughters she was the only one that had never married: and it was her privilege to be always at home. Charlotte had married, not very young, and had nothing but a rather silly prettiness to recommend her: her husband was a big, ungainly, good-natured man of fifty or so, who had travelled a good deal and liked talking of his travels; but grandmamma thought English people who did not stay quietly at home had better hold their tongues about it. Once, I remember, he was describing some Brazilian city to my mother, his mother-in-law dozing righteously in her high-backed chair the while.

"The ladies' costumes," he was saying, "are very picturesque, and the ladies are handsome too."

"Handsome!" shouted grandmamma. "And what has a married man to do talking of handsome women?"

"Really, ma'am, I was only telling Monica . . ." the poor man began to explain: but no hearing was given him.

"Ay! And Monica might set a better example to her lads than sit still in her husband's mother's house listening to her sister's lawful husband talking of handsome Brazilianesses. . . ."

Then my mother was rated, and "poor Charlotte" was rated more soundly still for "sitting smiling there" while her lawful wedded husband "went on" in such scandalous fashion. I was sent to bed for the indiscretion of being present on so shocking an occasion, and my brother Fleetwood was set down to play chess with the abandoned traveller, lest the latter should save himself by flight to the club. Clubs, I had hitherto thought, were institutions that went in procession once a year, in Robin Hood costumes, and got seven shillings a week when out of work or disabled by sickness: from my paternal grandmother I gathered new and livid impressions that they were sinks of iniquity, where smoking of the most unbridled description was practised by idle husbands whose wives had not the strength of character requisite for keeping them at home.

So Fleetwood and uncle Hezekiah (poor uncle, luckless even in his baptism!) were put down to chess. My second brother's real name was Ralph, but grandmamma's conjugal feelings were too sensitive to allow of her calling him by the name that had been her

husband's, a name by which she had scolded him daily during more than half a century : so she decreed that little Ralph should be known as Fleetwood—where he happened to have been born. My other brother and I were apt to forget this, and I think it was one of our mother's offences (not her only one, for she suffered us to spend our rare shillings in presents instead of wisely saving them up) that she was supposed to abet us in calling Ralph by the name she had given him in baptism.

If Ralph turned out the reverse of a prig it was all to his credit : at Chester his bringing up was strictly calculated to turn him out a prig of the driest flavour. By the time he was ten he played chess with all the dignitaries, male and female, attached to the Cathedral, and lived in an atmosphere of cats, unctuously buttered muffins, and diaconal or archidiaconal criticism of the secular public. Grandmamma's own cat, an elderly Persian bachelor, with a past perhaps, knew the tit-bits of all at table as well as the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson's dog knew the difference between cream and milk : and his intelligence was equally applauded. Verger was his subclerical name, and Verger was the only living creature I ever heard my grandfather's widow praise. But then he was dumb. Ah, that infused merit of dumbness ! how often have I heard it counted to him (and others since) for righteousness ! He knew as well when there were oysters—and oysters, mind you, have no smell, quoth grandmamma (she had not read of George I and his scorn of the tameness of English oysters that had not quitted their beds a week,

like those of Hanover), and oysters are an acquired taste even for Christians ! Could four-footed merit go further ? Yes, it could : Verger knew well which was liver and which was gizzard, and would not have gizzard palmed off on him : that would do for Aunt Eleanor.

It must be admitted I never appreciated my paternal grandmother. That her virtues were of a high order I knew on the highest authority : when she chose to be dying we were gathered about her bed, with what Charles II would have called "unconscionable" frequency, and she mentioned them in illustration of her fierce, almost triumphant, insistence on the fact that she was an abominable sinner. Had she particularised on her faults and merely generalised on her "dirty rags" of merit I think I might have liked her better. As it was, her dying philippics were intolerably gloomy, and none the less because she was always back in the dining-room enjoying sweet-breads a week after them. She really is dead now : otherwise she would be a hundred and thirty-two years old : and when the end came it was rather suddenly, so that we were not present. I did not like her house : it was a good house, in the most unimpeachable situation for a dignified clergyman's widow ; its windows raked the Deanery gardens, its own garden ran back to the Cathedral itself ; but the sun, a bachelor and "pagan I regret to say," never ogled it ; and its mien was dowagerial and heavy—I was going to write "air," but there never was any air in it.

I did like walking in the Rows with my mother :

rather furtive excursions these, for the best shops and the dearest were in the Rows, and grandmamma brooked but ill that we should expose ourselves, unchaperoned by Aunt Charlotte, to their seduction : and I did like walking on the city walls in the same company. There was a tower on them from which poor King Charles once saw some battle in which his loyal troops were defeated—I instantly took his part, not as knowing anything about him, except that his side lost. Once we met a couple of soldiers, the first I had ever seen, and their splendour filled me with awe—they were pipers in some Highland regiment, I think. They smiled pleasantly at the small boy whose sincere admiration may have flattered them, and I felt deeply such condescension in persons of so exalted a position. Half an hour afterwards we were in sight of the Castle, which was their barrack, and, on the green outside it, saw a number of ragged and dirty children whom certain slatternly women were scolding for not permitting themselves to be caught and slapped.

“Those,” my mother explained with a calmness that amazed me, “are some of the soldiers’ children.”

It was a heavy shock. Those brilliant creatures were not, it appeared, gentlemen of unlimited means and eminent rank. A blow of the same sort fell on me a year or so later, at home at Gracechurch, when I was first taken to see a travelling circus. In the middle of the arena stood a kind of Field-Marshal (only his figure was more graceful) armed with a whip whose lash was nearly as long as a paying-off pennant : and I longed to be presented to him, nourishing a secret

hope that he might stoop to drink tea with us. My mother did not see her way to seeking the desired introduction, which I attributed to diffidence in approaching the great : it was hard to believe my ears when she explained that her lukewarmness in admitting the ring-master to the bosom of her family was not precisely due to a meek sense of inferiority.

But we have wandered some distance from Gracechurch, and must hasten to return thither. There were, as I have said, no playfellows there for me till we had lived in the little town a good many months. That state of things came to an end by an accident that gave me the kindest friends of my youth.

Christmas came, and unspeakable were the delights it brought : the first snow I absolutely remember was one of them. I was born during a snowstorm, but that I did not profess to remember, often as I had heard of it. In this I was more discreet than Cardinal Manning, who told me, many years later, that the only part of his conduct as a child that had given umbrage to his strict and excellent parents was his obstinate insistence on a circumstantial recollection of their wedding. I never could, and never can, understand why people dislike and shudder at a snowstorm : to me it was, as a tiny child, and still remains, the loveliest, most exhilarating thing to look at of all the exquisite and mysterious loveliness that nature has to show us. My nurse said the angels were making the beds up in Heaven, and my only regret was that they made them at such negligently wide intervals. How lovely our homely street looked ! How picturesque

even old Richards had become as he trudged home with a sack over his shoulders for greatcoat ! The ugly slate roofs became miraculously beautiful : unsightly buildings seen from back windows took shapes and meanings so strange and lovely that they lost all connection with common life and dull purposes. Something marvellous was happening whereby all the trivial workaday world was being lifted out of any earthly latitude into regions of shining mystery and heavenly beauty. My heart beats again, nearly fifty years after, with the memory, more than the memory, the repetition of that first elation, when the snow comes again and brings back the first snowstorm I remember.

It came on Christmas Eve : and, at bed-time, all outside lay white and silent, as though the world were hiding its dark spots from the eyes of the Child that midnight brought : and holding her peace to let the angels' tender carol be heard unspoiled.

The Child that had all things was to send presents to children too poor to have many : and there they were, under our pillows, the first things we awoke to a dim unearthly consciousness of, long before the cold, late dawn broke. God only knows how poor our lonely mother was, or how, out of her poverty, she never failed of her gifts for her fatherless children : heavenly gifts they seemed, and the other Child must have helped her. What rich mother can taste the ineffable sweetness of such self-denials as poor mothers only can imagine ?

Post came, and its late arrival was not matter of

impatience, but only part of the general uncommonness of Christmas. There were no bicycles in those days, and Mr. White arrived on foot, with nose and cheeks matching the robins' breasts on the cards he brought: he was hung about with bulging bags, and he seemed determined to find something for us in each of them. There were eleven letters for me, each enclosing at least one card, and one containing a "tip"—for I had an aunt, widowed like my mother, and poor enough to remember little nephews to whom such gifts were like the unlooked for inheritance of a gold mine.

The joys of post were only half tasted by the time the church bells were flinging out their carol-peals over snowy street and field. But of that Christmas church-going we shall have to speak in another paper.

On Innocents' Day we were bidden to the first Christmas-tree I had ever heard of. It was for the smaller children of the parish, and was held in the infant-school that stood, almost out of the little town, on the top of St. John's Hill—so called from a priory of Knights of the Hospital that had stood there, and had disappeared thence even before the Reformation. I think that particular tree was given by Mrs. Grace of Gracechurch House, and the presents on it were graceful and beautiful, each carefully chosen by herself. I remember how it looked as well as if it were yesterday that I stood gazing at it. Our mother held us close to her, and bent to our ears whispering, "In the midst of the street thereof, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life, bearing twelve



manner of fruits, yielding its fruits every month ; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no curse any more." If this that we saw was the tree on this side of the river, what must that be like on the farther shore. . . . On the top even of this one, swaying with a tremulous ecstasy, like a lark's that "from heaven's gate or near it" broods over her helpless fledgelings, unfledged yet, hung a tiny angel, of pink wax, with wide golden wings. And Mrs. Grace gave it me. Colonel Grace was going round to all the children, asking what they would like, and coming back with his arms laden, from visit after visit to the glorious tree : no man had ever a kinder heart, or a more generous. It was a good thing that he was rich, for the poor that lived near him. But his wife was watching the children's eyes too.

"Perry," I heard her say, "I want *that*." And she nodded her beautiful head up at the soaring, stooping angel at the very top of the tall tree. It was not easy to get at it, and it was only meant for an ornament : but he had it down and put it in her hand. I did not wonder she wanted it. But it was not for herself.

"I am sure," she said to my mother, "your little boy wants this." And she gave it me. No lady had ever a friendlier smile, or a sweeter : it shines out from beyond the great gates that closed on her five-and-forty years ago, undimmed and unforgotten. By her side was her own little boy, her youngest child then, younger even than myself, and she left him

with us, but we did not talk much, only peeping shyly at each other : I had no idea then that he was to be the great friend of my childhood and boyhood.

Colonel Grace soon came back.

"I must give you something too," he said, filling my arms with presents off the inexhaustible tree.

By Sunday all the snow was gone, and a soft mild air had broken itself off from spring, and was making the silly little sanguine birds forget that it was December still. All by myself, that memorable Sunday afternoon, I was playing in the churchyard—a game of my own, with two children, "Robert and Georgie, aged 6 and 5 years," the record of whose brief earthly course was inscribed on a low stone under the wall that separated that part of the big churchyard from the Rectory gardens.

"That is the little boy that wanted the wax Cupid off the Christmas-tree," I heard a voice say, and looked up. There were Colonel Grace and Mrs. Grace, going home from a visit to Mrs. Derbyshire, the Rector's wife.

"Perry, it was *not* a Cupid," Mrs. Grace protested in indignant parenthesis. "Are you all alone?" she said to me, over the low mossy wall.

It was no use telling her : grown-up people could not be supposed to understand children's games : so I attempted no explanation, though I knew very well that "Robert aged 6 years" was dark and slightly lame, whereas Georgie had golden hair and sang best.

"Let's take him home to tea," said Colonel Grace.

"Would your mother mind?" asked Mrs. Grace.

"Come along," the Colonel called out decisively. "Jenks shall go and tell Mrs. Ayscough we've stolen him."

Jenks I knew. He was the cowman, a long, awkwardly jointed man, with eleven children and a vague smile that never quite arrived or had any particular occasion for even promising to arrive. He looked after the Gracechurch House poultry, and went on any errand that was not supposed to demand headlong haste.

It seemed a strong measure: but there was nothing gipsyish about the kidnappers, and there could be no motive for a permanent theft, as they were provided with five young Graces of their own—I was not yet aware that three was the orthodox number—so I went.

To Gracechurch House was a walk of less than five minutes; Colonel Grace let us and himself in without ringing, and the schoolroom was the first room we came to: it was large and comfortable with none of the spare gauntness often considered essential in a schoolroom. On a large table a formidable array of plates, cups and saucers was set out, for there was never any drawing-room tea at Gracechurch House, all visitors being brought to the schoolroom. Miss Tatten, armed with a copper kettle, was making tea and sustaining obvious defeat in an argument with Cynthia Fielding, Colonel Grace's stepdaughter, who was then a very lovely girl of sixteen. Her brothers, Roger and Eustace, home from Sandhurst and Oxford,

were taking the stronger side and converting the poor governess's defeat into a rout. Lisa, Mildred, and Veronica Grace had possession of all the rocking-horse except his tail with which Nanette, at the other end of the room, was dusting her little brother's face as though he were a Dresden China little boy, or some object infested with mosquitoes. So many introductions would have been very trying, and I was presented only to Miss Tatten.

"This, Tattie," observed Colonel Grace, "is Johnnie Ayscough, whom we found among the tombs."

If I was a demoniac I was such a little one that Miss Tatten only smiled provisionally. On the whole, I think, she slightly disapproved of children except those under her charge : and our acquaintance never ripened, on her side, to anything mellow than an unbiassed readiness to disapprove of anything reprehensible that might supervene in me. Miss Tatten had been poor for over half a century and had a prejudice in favour of people with ample means. She adored Colonel and Mrs. Grace, and would have taught their children a great deal had she known anything herself. As it was she spoiled them, and apprehensively awaited the moment, to arrive very soon now, when a more efficient governess would step into her pattering satin shoes. Her pupils were all clever, but she had never caught the infection.

Nobody, I think, ever disliked Miss Tatten unless it were Bram, who now sailed into the schoolroom by a door that led to the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Brampton had never married, but took brevet rank

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and title, and had long ceased to be a servant and become a very highly trusted friend. She had been nurse to all the Grace children, who all loved her, chaffed her, and respected her. Miss Tatten was small and compact, with a twittering, fussily meek demeanour. "Bram" was tallish, and had the manner of a Duchess who had seen better days, but did not mind. Her heirloom was a bit of her own jawbone, with three childish teeth in it, which for some cause had been removed, some sixty years before, from the usual situation, and now reposed in a small shagreen box in her writing-desk, whence, on occasions calling for special reward or encouragement, it was drawn forth and displayed. Had the relic not become one, Bram's smile might have been more level, so to speak, but it would have lost character. She had another distinction called "flushes." When walking with us she would occasionally sign to us to walk on—and we were not supposed to look back. Had we done so we should have seen her standing still with a cambric handkerchief pressed to her face, as though the teeth in her desk were still aching.

Bram had a grim and caustic power of repartee, but a kind and most true heart, and I doubt if there were ever a better Wesleyan. When, nearly fourteen years after our first meeting, I became a Catholic, she assured me that she was now at liberty to respect me—"as honest in error": which left the unpleasant inference that dishonesty in truth was the common lot of High Anglicans.

Schoolroom tea was a solid meal at Gracechurch

House, and I remember, years after this, hearing a visitor ask with some awe, "Do I understand that you *dine* after this?" When we had finished, it was decided by Mrs. Grace that we (that is, her younger children and their small guest) should play Hare and Hounds—a game of which I had never heard. It had a somewhat sporting sound for a Sunday amusement, but, as I had already seen my new friends taking rocking-horse exercise unhidden, it seemed that to follow the chase afoot was but another illustration of the same principle. At home Noah's Ark had been my only Sunday toy: but Noah and his family (as representing the human race) had in my hands, like man, to play many parts. Sometimes they were farmers, sometimes they held a market, in which elephants and canaries of the same size were exposed for sale. Without Scripture warrant, my ark contained a dozen trees—like green thimbles on pink stalks, which gave quite a Continental look to the market-place.

My notion of Hare and Hounds was unfortunately realistic: Nanette was elected hare, and, after an excellent run up and down a rather steep country, including the back and front stairs, I ran her to earth just outside the study door—where Colonel Grace was writing letters—and seized her with my teeth. She wept, and my conduct was justly reprobated: deeply contrite, and of a rich peony colour, I was haled before the Colonel, to whom I pleaded my ignorance of the game, and my impression that a dog in my circumstances would *not* have merely laid hold of the hare's pink

sash with his paw—as I now learned too late was the etiquette I should have observed.

“Well, well ! ‘You’re sorry, aren’t you, Johnnie ?’” Colonel Grace observed—mildly impatient to go on with his letters. “Beg her pardon and kiss her.”

The sentence was terribly embarrassing. Offender and *offendee* each numbered seven springs at most : but, if the latter had numbered seventeen summers, the culprit could not have obeyed more shyly. Miss Tatten, on hearing of my reprehensible behaviour, lifted her drab eyebrows and said she was surprised, clearly meaning that she wasn’t. Bram, on the other hand, advocated a more Sabbatical and less “tearing” recreation, and, repentance being in the air, a quiet game of Church was decided upon. It was politely suggested that I should be clergyman, and one of Tot’s nightgowns was offered as surplice, and a cylindrical clothes-basket as pulpit—Tot was Mrs. Grace’s little boy, who was not called Peregrine for many years yet. Conscious, however, of the defective nature of my recent personal conduct I excused myself from preaching to others, and Veronica, most uncanonically, was voted into the clothes-basket. Thrown off its balance by the fire of her eloquence, it capsized, which instantly suggested a change of metaphor.

“She looks,” we agreed, “exactly like Jonah,” and the nursery sofa was promptly equipped as a ship, whence Tot was cast into the deep to be swallowed by the wicker whale. He could get in himself : but *we* assisted nature when the moment for his rejection by the fish arrived.

So passed my first visit to Gracechurch House, where for many years, henceforth, the greater part of my time was spent: and I must say we hardly ever quarrelled, though we played at brigands and highway-men and many other games that might have led to resentment, considering how little the public has ever liked being robbed or held up to ransom under pain of the loss of an ear, or so. As for Colonel and Mrs. Grace they treated me precisely as they treated their own children, none of whom ever betrayed or felt the slightest jealousy, or the smallest remembrance that their playfellow was very poor, and could not possibly have counted on such pleasures as were brought into his life by his intimacy with them.

Colonel and Mrs. Grace have been dead many, many years: but if the unforgetting gratitude of a child on whom they showered unnumbered kindnesses can weave a wreath unfading they are not uncrowned.



## CHAPTER IX

### CHRISTMAS CROSSES

ONE day, during our first year at Gracechurch, while we still lived in Watergate, Mrs. Hornskull appeared at our sitting-room door, diffusing, as was her wont, an atmosphere of soft soap and moisture: for her daylight hours were mostly spent in washing something. Her nature was rather irascible than excitable, but to-day she really was indulging in a certain grim elation.

"As sure as there's two sixpences in a shilling," she announced, "Miss Galt o' Whitehouse is comin' to pay you a call, Ma'am. There's the Whitehouse carriage and pair" (I followed her eyes to the window and, sure enough, there was a large carriage out in the street, though I saw no pear) "and it's stopped by our door. Ah! didn't I tell you? There's our knocker. Drat them footmen: they knock a sight noisier nor quality."

Much as she would have preferred to stay and enlighten us concerning the wealth and importance of Miss Galt of Whitehouse, Mrs. Hornskull had to defer that duty—she held it more than a pleasure—and go to the front door.

Through the window I could see Miss Galt, sitting

alone in a very roomy landau with her back to the horses : meanwhile Mrs. Hornskull and the footman were in audible parley—for the passage was short, and she had left our door ajar.

“Does Mrs. Ayscough live here?”

“No” (loudly and firmly : loudly because the footman “put her back up” : firmly because a principle was involved).

“Oh ! They said this was the house. Can you tell me, please, which *is* her number ?”

Mrs. Hornskull was prepared for aggression and ready to resent it : no street in Gracechurch had numbers : the numbering of houses she esteemed a London fashion, and the footman was probably a London young man : of London she entirely disapproved, as a town superficially scrubbed and of correspondingly defective morality.

“She ain’t got no number, the lady haven’t. She *lodges* here.”

“Oh ! Is she at home ?”

“*I’m* at home : she’s *in*.”

The footman (who came from Graceminster and had never been to London in his life) reported at the carriage door, and Miss Galt came in. Mrs. Hornskull led her to our door, making a *castanetty* noise with her feet on the stone floor of the passage : for when not in bed she was always mounted on clogs, or pattens, as they are called out of Gracechurch.

“Mrs. Ayscough’s parlour,” she announced, and withdrew to the steamy regions where she cultivated

her three theological virtues of scrubbing, washing, and rinsing.

Miss Galt was tall, and what used to be called elegant. She had been lovely as a very young girl, and was still something more than pretty : I suppose she was then about thirty. She moved gracefully, and had a sort of beauty manners without being in the least affected. Her dress suited her, and was rather more picturesque than the fashion of 1865 warranted : it was not at all "smart," neither was it altogether simple, but had a certain subdued richness : the lace she wore was old and very costly, her silks were of what was then called a "sad" colour, but soft in tone and texture and of a cut special to herself : there was something half-quakerish about it—but suggestive of a quakeress who knew that she was comely, and did not choose to look merely odd, but did not mind looking a little prim. In her hand she carried a great bunch of flowers, rare and lovely hot-house flowers, and they seemed part of her costume, though they were really a present for my mother.

They served her for introduction : they had not greeted each other before she could see that flowers were my mother's delight and passion. Over that bouquet the two women became intimate in as many minutes.

Camilla (to my mother she soon became Camilla, though not on that day) handed over the lovely creatures—God's creatures have not all legs—as tenderly as if they had been so many pretty children

to whom she was quite sure my mother would be kind : and they talked about them, and smiled over them, and made much of them, just as you have seen women doing when actual children are being worshipped by them. Camilla Galt was a person with an "atmosphere" of her own, and while she was in our small and ugly parlour she gave a sort of distinction to it : a distinction that was very distinctive too : somewhat serious, rather subdued, a little pensive. For she had had her story—a romance, and not a prosperous one.

In those days, long before our famous Gracechurch Mission, she was the only lady who went about regularly and constantly among the poor people : and she was generous and sympathetic, pitifully tender-hearted, and entirely silent as to her alms and her charity : but I doubt if the poor people ever cared for her as much as they cared for Mrs. Grace.

"Mrs. Grace was so *free*."

Free, in that sense, was a Gracechurch word, and meant nothing to do with giving—though Mrs. Grace was as open-handed as she was open-mouthed. Mrs. Grace was not subdued : her voice made one think of open windows and fresh air, healthy breezes, and big, sunny, smiling flowers. When she spoke to a poor person her voice was not modulated : its tone was half jocular, as if she found her fellow-creatures rather good fun, and knew that they must find her good company—as they did, prosperous or poverty-pinched : not that I think the pinch of Gracechurch poverty was often very sharp.

If anyone was an incorrigible beggar Mrs. Grace chaffed, and refused to be moved, but gave what was wanted all the same : Camilla had scruples. To give to one who did not really need seemed to her a robbery of someone in greater stress : and she hesitated—no doubt she too succumbed in nine cases out of ten, but she hesitated first : and it was not counted to her, in our back streets, for righteousness.

And, I think, Camilla dressed more plainly, a shade more primly, when visiting the poor : old and almost shabby garments of meek fashion seemed to her more suitable when going among those who could only afford to wear what was old and shabby. The contrast of prosperity and indigence she shrank from accentuating. Mrs. Grace never set out on an afternoon's deliberate visiting of the poor : she dropped in haphazard for some special purpose, or because some open door suggested a visit—and, if she thought of it at all, concluded that old Betty Perkins might like to see pretty clothes, and enjoy the look of prosperity if she had not much of it herself. And Betty did. Miss Galt might leave Betty repentant, but Mrs. Grace left her chuckling and gratified. Whether the old woman stood most in need of repentance or cheerfulness must be left to clearer eyes than ours : we most of us need both : and perhaps that was why those clear Eyes sent Betty both.

Camilla and Mrs. Grace were fast friends. Until my mother cropped up I think Mrs. Grace was the only real friend Camilla had. It was from Mrs. Grace that

my mother, in due time, heard the story of Camilla's romance.

Only a few days after Miss Galt's visit we went to luncheon at Whitehouse : and I naturally remember all about it, as I had never been out to luncheon before. The Whitehouse landau came for us about twelve, and Mrs. Hornskull watched our departure with stony glee. She ascribed it all to herself—though her cleanliness, and other merits, had never procured an invitation to lunch at Whitehouse for our predecessor in the lodgings, a sickly young exciseman, who had left his daguerreotype on our mantelpiece : a speaking likeness, doubtless, though you could see nothing unless you held him sideways in a certain light, and then only that he wore spectacles and a spacious smile—"from ear to ear" as my mother frankly avowed. "From 'ere to there you might say," Mrs. Hornskull admitted with equal frankness. "But he hadn't much to smile at, Mr. Bowker hadn't, being in a decline and only five-and-twenty like his mother before him and his sister as married Rev. Stamlin the Methody parson : he cuffed [coughed] so's some would ha' raised the rent on him o' nights—through the dog-licences and what not rain snow or shine. But I doubt he's in Abraham's bozum, though Liverpool was the last I heard."

I do not think I had ever been driven in a carriage and pair before, and I liked it as much as Dr. Johnson used. The drive was not, however, long, for Whitehouse is not more than a mile and a half out of Gracechurch ; and it was all familiar ground till we turned in at the lodge gates. We passed by the lake, with the

gardens of Gracechurch House on our right, and their well-timbered fields, not unlike a park. Then, on the other side was the real park of Wheatly House, where Mrs Wymering lived in dowager state, with the young but remarkably stout squire. Whitehouse stood in a sort of smallish park of its own, with good trees but no deer—only some Scotch cattle of truculent appearance. The house was really a large villa, though that word is so misused in England that to say so may give an inadequate idea of its size and quality. It had been built about the beginning of George III's reign on the site of an older house—for the gardens and shrubberies were much older, and were both large and beautiful. There were two large halls, and we went first into a big room with an odd but fascinating paper—all painted by hand and never repeating itself; it represented a limitless classic garden, with temples, triumphal arches, marble bridges, and pleasure houses; fountains, canals, tanks with marble balustrades; and groups of Greek ladies and gentlemen, all young, cheerful, and perfectly self-satisfied. Some of them were swinging in swings made of flowers, others were sauntering through sunny glades—others were catching golden fishes, or idling in boats on the very blue water. The furniture of this room—and of all the house—would have driven a collector nowadays mad with envy.

Out of it a very large drawing-room opened, and across the hall was the dining-room, also very spacious, and hung with quite splendid Flemish tapestry—designed by Van Ostade, I should guess. But we lunched

in the library, not much smaller than the other rooms, and lined to the ceiling with books in handsome eighteenth-century bindings. There we were introduced to Mr. Galt, Miss Jasmine Galt, and Mr. Lancelot Galt. Camilla's father was an old man, with a white head, and coldly fiery eyes ; he was very courteous to my mother, and, as he knew all about Natural History, they soon got on very well on that occasion and ever afterwards. But he rather frightened me, and I think he was used to alarming weak persons and did not dislike it.

He had bought the Whitehouse estate about thirty years before the date of our first visit, from a family called White ; and had not paid too much for it. For a couple of thousand acres of good land, rich pasture and woodland, a very pretty lake called White Mere, the big house, and all its furniture, tapestry, and books, and a cellar of wine worth five hundred pounds he had given, it was said, £10,000 !

Mrs. Galt was long dead, and Camilla and Jasmine had grown up very much alone ; Rentshire squires, in those days—perhaps still—being very exclusive, and not inclined to open their doors promptly to a North of Ireland Scotchman who had grown rich in the most indefensible fashion—by means of railway shares, and who was a Radical of fluent tongue and pen.

Jasmine Galt was not in the least like her sister : she was five years younger, and had already white hair, handsome features of a decisive cast, a clever, hard mouth and chin, and alert, penetrating eyes of an unrestrained capacity for seeing the weak points



in things and people. Her hair was cut short and brushed back, reaching not much below the nape of her neck : by day she always wore a short skirt of rough grey frieze, a leathern belt, and a "Garibaldi" indoors and a mannish cloth jacket out of doors. Her boots were shooting boots, and her hard linen collar was fastened with a silver brooch—the only "ornament" she ever condescended to—representing a greyhound's head. Her tastes were for shooting, coursing, riding to hounds, and training greyhounds. I daresay Mr. Galt kept a "whip" for his hounds, but the man was only Jasmine's understudy.

The two sisters had not a taste on earth—or above it—in common : but they were fond of each other and lived amicably together, that is in the same house. His younger daughter was Mr. Galt's companion, and, as was supposed, his political accomplice.

Lancelot Galt had been the old man's pride, and was now his special irritation. He did not care much for Radical politics—only just enough to prevent his being popular with the Tory squires around and their sons : nor was he horsey, or doggy. He had leaned towards literature and scholastic achievements, and his father had passed the word that he was to be distinguished in letters and classical lore. At Rugby—Mr. Galt would not hear of Eton—he had done well : and his father was content. At Oxford he had really done well, too, and had passed with honours, but not the very highest : and Mr. Galt would not be content with less. Poor Lancelot came home, disappointed on his own account, but knowing that he

had done better than nine hundred and ninety-nine young men out of every thousand of his year : his father received him as if he had failed altogether and ignominiously.

Lancelot's consoler was his elder sister : but her consolation, gentle and sweet as it was, was never quite sufficient.

In our last paper we spoke of Christmas, our first Christmas at Gracechurch : and that Christmas Day was rendered memorable in Gracechurch annals by a certain tremendous action of Mr. Galt's.

Between him and the Rector of Gracechurch there was for some reason always a state of armed truce—two reasons I know of : the Rector was not a vehement Tory, but he did dislike vehement Radicals ; and Mr. Galt could not away with a Puseyite. Of the Rector's Puseyism we will not speak here ; it was so mild that the modern ritualist would altogether despise it : nevertheless he did hold "High" doctrines—heard confessions (or let us say one parishioner's confessions), believed in sacraments and apostolical succession, and recognised "Saints' Days"—such as *Corpus Christi*, that had its place in the Prayer Book Calendar, but was a feast horribly obnoxious to Mr. Galt. It was chiefly at the Board of Guardians that Mr. Galt and his parish clergyman met—and struggled : not, it may seem, a very favourable ground for theological disputes. But Mr. Galt could smell Popery where few would have suspected it. For instance : the boys in our workhouse had, ever since collars had been allowed them by the Board, worn those

collars buttoned behind, to mark, I suppose, their defective citizenship as paupers. It gave them something the air of a set of future ecclesiastics who had only got as far as their necks in ecclesiasticism. The Rector proposed, in Board Meeting, that the collars might as well be buttoned in front, as it would cost ratepayers no more, and look less ridiculous.

Mr. Galt was up in arms and long and fiercely spake he: it was, he averred, the thin end of the wedge, of that wedge whose thick end was Rome.

To a gentleman of this habit of mind it is obvious that the rumour of special Christmas decorations of the church would come fraught with the darkest suspicion. Holly and ivy around the pillars he did not resent: mistletoe he would have thought a neat and timely addition to the evergreens. But word crept round that somewhere there was to be a cross! Certain youngish ladies had been given the pulpit for their sphere of operation: and somehow it took wind that they proposed a cross of holly and variegated ivy on the front panel. A bird of the air carried the matter—a jackdaw, perhaps; they had boxes for them to build in, in the trees round Whitehouse. The jackdaw flew back to Gracechurch with the tidings that if a cross was to appear on that pulpit Mr. Galt would do something tremendous.

The youngish ladies (the oldest could not then have been more than fifty) fled to the Rector, and pleaded the soft impeachment. There *was* to have been a cross: they had made it: had they better reverently burn it? The Rector said, No: as they had intended

to place it there, let it go there. And it went. And Mr. Galt came. He came in semi-state : accompanied (as Court Circulars say) by Miss Jasmine, and attended by Miss Galt and Lancelot. The two last-named looked thoroughly miserable : Miss Jasmine, on whose arm her father leaned, looked stern, and felt (one suspects) uneasy. She liked Puseyism as little as her father, but she hated a fuss.

The Whitehouse party entered almost late, at the last moment : when the Rector was at the point of saying "Enter not into judgment . . ." as soon as the carol should be ended.

The Gracechurch House party already filled the front seat on each side, Mrs. Grace, as was her habit, carrying a nosegay, innocent there—if it had been upon the altar Mr. Galt would have protested bitterly. The second seat at the right-hand side was the Wheatly Park "pew" (we had not really any pews left but open sittings) and Mrs. Wymering, short-sighted and agog, for rumour had crept across the lake too, was fidgety, and armed with gleaming pince-nez : young Squire Wymering was stoutly alert, not desiring mischief but willing to be amused by it, as it was none of his brewing.

The Whitehouse seat was in the same line : we sat in the Rectory pew next behind.

Being Christmas, we began with a hymn, an extra one, and the choir was singing "Peace on earth and mercy mild" when the Galt family entered. Mr. Galt "wore" (as Miss Mildstone put it) a crutch, and it clattered as he walked in. His uncrutched side Miss

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Jasmine supported. They filed into their seat: Miss Galt first, who knelt: Lancelot next, who compounded—propping forward towards the book-rest: “on his hunkers” as the Scotch say—which Mr. Birrell knows he has no right to translate “on his knees”: then Mr. Galt, who devoutly peered into his hat: and finally poor Miss Jasmine with the crutch to dispose of.

Her father gave her time: he had carefully ignored the pulpit thus far: not until his Christmas prayer for peace was safely bestowed in the crown of his hat did he suffer his eyes to raise themselves; and then they were lifted slowly with dramatic unsuspicion, till, till, till they reached the front of the pulpit (partially, but not sufficiently obscured by Miss Tatten’s niddle-nodding bonnet): and then they descried, in all its horror, the flat, not strictly artistic, cross, of single holly and ivy leaves, stitched down upon brown paper. Flatly it was a cross: and a cross in a Christian church was what Mr. Galt never had put up with, and never would.

He sat erect; he leant forward; he adjusted, with fell deliberation, and steady, withered hand, his gold-rimmed spectacles: he stared, he glared; and he removed his glasses, wiping them scrupulously before returning them to their case, as fain to rub out of them the terrible pollution they had transmitted to his cold, angry blue eyes. Then—it would be a levity to say he nudged Miss Jasmine: but his elbow sought her ribs, and he arose to much more than his full height: to the chill and frozen altitudes from which Popery can be scowled down upon. Miss Jasmine arose too,

sternly impassive, and gave her left arm, grasping the crutch, till, in mid-aisle, it could be fitted under her father's armpit. Lancelot trickled feebly after ; Miss Galt, with a painful glow upon her gentle face, brought up the rear—and the Whitehouse party filed out. They had to pass close by the reading-desk—for at morning service the clergyman read from a desk parallel with lectern and pulpit, at the top of the body of the church, and not from a stall in the chancel.

The free-seats filled all the space under the tower, between reading-desk and choir, and every old woman in them was able, during the rest of that Christmas-morning service, to make up her own description of Mr. Galt's looks. His face was pale as death ; as red as a turkey-cock (red turkey-cocks are not common in farmyards) ; he looked, according to Mrs. Plox—who was a Wesleyan on Sundays, and came to church only on feasts when loaves were distributed—like the Avenging Angel : he looked, said Mrs. Glubbin, who sat next to her (so great a difference can a small angle make) like Beelzebub. But all agreed that Miss Galt looked fit to drop, and needed someone's arm to lean on much more than her father. .

From that day to his death Mr. Galt never "worshipped" in Gracechurch Church again ; Lancelot and his elder sister reappeared on the next Sunday—though the cross was still on the pulpit ; but Miss Jasmine escorted their father to Welshchurch every Sunday during the rest of Mr. Galt's life. The odd part of this was that Welshchurch was really Ritualistic, for 1865 ; there the clergyman had crosses on his

stole, which varied in colour with the season, and matched the chalice-veil. There were flowers on the altar, and banners with crosses of several kinds ; and the vicar crossed himself undisguisedly at the end of the Creed, and made a cross in the air while reading the absolution—to the untheological mind it might seem that Mr. Galt had crutched himself out of the frying-pan into the fire. But Mr. Galt's theology was subtle if not refined, and he caused it to be noted that Welshchurch was not his parish : the goings-on there lay not on his conscience as a parishioner ; his presence condoned nothing, while his absence from the church that *was* his own must be a continual protest.

Miss Broom, unable to grasp so abstract a principle, was inclined to think that the *number* of crosses at Welshchurch somehow rendered them less objectionable. "In his own pew," she said, "I observed, one week-day when I was showing our church to a visitor, there is a red carpet all over little crosses, turn and turn about with floor de lees, in a dimond pattern. He must have noticed them—but being such a many, I suppose he didn't mind."

"Perhaps," suggested the caustic Miss Dray, "he doesn't mind them underfoot. Even Turks don't object to crosses—to stamp on."

## CHAPTER X

### THE MOUNT AND COUSIN JEM

WHEN we first went to Gracechurch old Mrs. Tudor lived at the Mount in dowagerial state, that is to say she kept a footman who, like David, had been young : for about twenty years he admitted, to intimates, being "o' the prudent side o' forty" : then he died, and his tombstone (erected by Llewelyn Tudor, Esq.) gave explicit information as to his age and present whereabouts, stating that he had passed to realms beyond the skies in the sixty-sixth year of his life and the forty-eighth of his tried and faithful service of the Tudor family of Penygran in this County. The public were left in doubt as to whether it were his late mistress, or Llewelyn, Esq., who had "tried" him.

Llewelyn lived at the Mount with his mother, who always alluded to him as "My youngest son Loo," which gave an elderly impression as to the present Squires of Penygran : for there really were two, Squire Owen and Squire Pryce, who were twins. Squire Pryce was the younger by nearly twenty minutes, and showed great deference to Squire Owen, whom he always represented as being on the point of matrimony with a lady of large fortune and high connec-



tions : but Squire Owen repudiated her fiercely, and pointed out the absurdity of the idea. How could he marry and set a mistress over his brother Pryce's head? Did not Pryce always sit opposite him at dinner? How would it look to send him to one side?

Anyway, they neither of them did marry : though once it was rumoured that, at Bath, they had been "particular" towards the twin daughters of Lord Ecclefechan, the Ladies Elspeth and Margaret Dunwhiddie : it turned out afterwards that Squire Owen never could find out which Squire Pryce preferred, and would on no account speak up till he was sure, lest by mishap he should ruin his brother's hopes of earthly happiness. Squire Pryce was in the same difficulty, not unnaturally, owing to his senior's apparent vacillation. So it came to nothing, and the two Squires returned to Penygran, each with his hopes of earthly happiness intact. Thence they would drive in, once a fortnight—every other Wednesday—to call upon their mother and Llewelyn—in a large canary-coloured chariot on C springs and straps, with their sisters Jane and Eliza opposite.

The two Squires faced the horses, not out of any lack of gallantry, but because Miss Jane dreaded "chaps" (nothing would induce Miss Mildstone to believe she ever used a term with such horrible associations) : and Miss Eliza could never make her sister hear out driving unless she sat beside her.

When I saw them they were always, all four of them,

asleep, and tumbling about as the big carriage swung from side to side on its leathern straps.

Mrs. Tudor never returned these visits—though she liked them—for she esteemed all horses “wicked,” and clave to a bath-chair. In her bath-chair and an “ugly,” she was slowly dragged forth by Jonah (the tried and faithful footman), on sunshiny mornings in spring and autumn and on shady afternoons in summer. A walking-stick may not seem a useful article of costume in a bath-chair: but Mrs. Tudor always “wore” one.

“It does,” she explained, “to stir Jonah up with, and point things out.”

She used to beckon me to her with it, and our conversation was apt to begin as follows: “You’re Mrs. Ayscough’s little boy, eh? Pretty creature too (not *you*, my dear): and with three sons to bring up, poor young woman! I know what it is being left a widow with three sons.”

As the late Squire had not left her a widow till her youngest son was over fifty, and had also left her provided with a jointure of two thousand a year, I was not sure that she really did know what it was.

“I was well-looking myself,” the old lady would go on, settling her head in her bonnet and slightly agitating her silvery curls. “The Pocket-Venus of the Wrekin, they used to call me once: it’s a pity there’s no Christian goddess of beauty, then decent young women with a certain appearance would not be likened to such a heathen baggage. Prophet, you can pull on—I call him Prophet because he’s Jonah

and came out of Wales. Can you eat an apple, my dear ? ”

I replied that I had progressed that far in my education, and Mrs. Tudor then bade me “step in and tell Porkins she’s to give you one.” For the bath-chair exercise mostly took place on a sort of paved court in front of the Mount, between it and one of the gateways into the churchyard.

Porkins always gave the apple very graciously, and it consisted of about a dozen apples, some pears or apricots, and a bag of nuts.

“They don’t disagree with boys,” she would say. “Nothing do : unless it’s lessons.”

Porkins mostly dressed in old clothes, very good and handsome old clothes, that had belonged to her mistress : and I think she believed herself to resemble Mrs. Tudor, but it was in a respectful, unsuggestive way, and gave no offence.

When Mrs. Tudor died I missed her, though we had never talked to each other for more than five minutes at a time : and I expected Llewelyn would pine away, but it did not seem to occur to him. He merely let the Mount and retired to a sort of bachelor dower-house in Primpley, where he proved the absurdity of the dictum that it is not possible to do absolutely nothing : proved it for about fifteen years, at the end of which time he died, as he had lived, for no apparent reason.

Meanwhile the Mount was let at first to a Major Lloyd, with about forty sandy hairs which he wore, well moistened, in a sort of flat wreath athwart his

shiny scalp. His sister, Miss Jemima Lloyd, lived with him, and it turned out that they were our cousins. How this was I never made out ; but Cousin Jemima said it was so, and the Major agreed that women always knew all about such matters, and intimated that we had better call him Cousin Duck—for reasons best known to themselves, his godfathers and godmothers, in his baptism, had bestowed no other name upon him than Duckwrath. So there we were, suddenly enriched with a brace of totally new relations, who shared some seventy summers between them : Cousin Jem was a generous soul and would never take, I think, anything like her fair share : she would have been, Cousin Duck hinted, entitled to rather more than half : but she would not hear of it.

“Nonsense, Duck. It does you no harm to be forty : and nothing you can say will make me more than thirty. You’ve got the money—take the seniority too.”

This relationship made my mother’s head go round, for anything to do with pedigrees reduced her to imbecility.

“It’s through Mrs. Ayscough of Wales,” Cousin Jem would explain airily. “You say yourself you’ve often heard of Mrs. Ayscough of Wales.”

We all had. About fifty years before, a certain Roger Ayscough died—in Yorkshire or Cornwall, I think—and his widow retired to hide her sorrows among the Welsh hills. She was about sixty then, never married again, and had not previously enriched the world with Ayscoughs to marry and bring us

related to the Lloyds. So how we *were* related my mother could never tell : Cousin Jem would never adduce anything but Mrs. Ayscough of Wales.

Cousin Duck did nothing in particular—perhaps that was why he came to live at Gracechurch : he sat all day in the “study” smoking in a lethargic manner ; and he dined well and silently every day. Afterwards he sang ;

“ I’ll be free and easy still.”

And went to sleep till it was time to rejoin his brandy and soda in the study.

In the study were forty-one pipes, all meerschaum, and he taught me, in the ninth year of my age, and the six-thousand and sixty-ninth of original sin, to smoke one of them. He liked me better than my brother Phil because I was not sick, though four years younger.

All the same I never really believed in him. His comatose good-nature and affluence did not dazzle, though they impressed. He lent us air-guns, and rook-rifles : on rare occasions he tipped us—as it were reluctantly, rattling his money first to warm his imagination, and slowly drawing forth, say, two half-sovereigns, then, more hastily, exchanging them for four half-crowns, or, if luck favoured him, for four two-shilling bits. He was apt, for several weeks afterwards, to inquire how we were spending the cash ; till the tenor of our replies pointing to the fact that it *was* spent, his inquiries cooled.

Cousin Jem had not much money of her own, and she cheated the housekeeping books too freely,

for the sake of charities, to be able to give frequent tips. When she did give one, it was with a sudden bounce, and it was never alluded to after.

We liked her much more than Cousin Duck, and she was in fact much the better fellow of the two. In spite of her Welsh father and her Welsh name, she took after her Irish mother, and was an impulsive, warm-hearted, generous creature, whom it was easy to laugh at and impossible not to like. She even contrived to have a comfortable tinge of brogue that warmed her talk and gave it un-local colour. She told remarkable stories, and wagged her head in the telling, as who should say, "If ye don't believe me, don't tell me, and no harm's done."

She did not want to be an old maid, and was willing to assist Providence in warding off the catastrophe. There came, one Christmas, to stay with the Miss Whitefords, a cousin of the right sex for cousin Jem—rare in Gracechurch. He was (as Luke the Miller, in the *Mill on the Floss*, said he doubted the Prodigal Son would turn out in the long run) "no great shakes." But he was a man, and not plain, and he had not sixpence, and he thought Cousin Jem had ; and they became engaged. I think Cousin Jem insisted upon it. The happy man submitted : never much more : he was not for belittling his sacrifice—he was of less than Cousin Jem's even official age. He went back to London, and Cousin Jem wrote to him by every post, and he replied on Sundays, even oftener if Good Friday happened to fall in the week. Poor Cousin Jem : she was terribly fond of him,

and, if he had been worth sixpence instead of not having one, he should have grown fond of her. But alas, he only studied wills and settlements at Somerset House or somewhere, and found out that Cousin Jem had rather less of her own than two hundred a year. Of course he made *her* break it off : that sort of man always does. It was not, perhaps, easy : but he knew what he wanted, and it had nothing to do with what *she* wanted.

"I'm free, Johnnie ! I'm free !" Cousin Jem announced one day with desperate triumph.

"These," she cried with a difficult smile, "are my letters—I begged him keep the dimond pin, and me father's gold repeater I gave 'm, and the chain. And these are his to me. I'm sealing them up to send him back."

There was no parcel-post in those days, and it must have cost him something in postage to return the fat bundles of thick letters, on thick scented paper, all written in her big headlong handwriting. His made but a meagre packet : but it was hard for her to let them go.

"I've never slept without 'em under me pillow all these months," she whimpered. I knew, as well as if she had confessed it, they were the only love-letters she had ever had, and she was nearly forty, and there would never be any more.

Poor Cousin Jem ! She did not lose much : but she would not believe it. And when, a year after, the man she had been fond of married, she sent him a wedding-present.

"Sure he'd have married *me* if I'd had six hundred a year instead of two," she declared proudly. "And what's a fellah to do with only his looks and his good legs to stand on? The teapot and things'll remind him of an old friend that's a friend still—and sixty ounces they weigh : solid. They were my godmother's, Lady Frinck o' Frinck Hall, and I shall never want any of my own now. . . ."

The prospect of pouring out tea for the term of her natural life from Cousin Duck's pot forced a few tears from her eyes, but her undefeated smile shone through them, rainbow-fashion.

"There's no getting over it, I'm an old maid now," laughed Cousin Jem. "Well, it's no sin, anyway, or there's many that'll never see glory in England."

And she stoutly sealed her packet with a good deal of wax, and half a dozen driblets that surrounded the main body like Jupiter's moons.

One result of her disengagement was that Cousin Jem became Higher Church. She had always had a spark-like tendency to fly upwards, and now she soared aloft into unfettered ritualism. Of course, it was the ritualism of the sixties, still it was very disconcerting to Gracechurch—which was far from feeling itself low. She made a huge necklace of jet beads look as like a rosary as she could by the addition of a crucifix : and when she crossed herself all the beads rattled, and Cousin Duck scowled. She fasted to that degree that a glass of port and a biscuit was constantly required between meals. She had an "altar" in her room—whither Cousin Duck never



penetrated—with statues and candles and flowers : as she mounted higher the flowers even became artificial. She left a prayer-book in her place at church “with Latin in it,” to the grim delight of the sexton’s wife who dusted the seats ; and that lady did not hesitate to inform her friends that Miss Lloyd was a female Jesuit—a more numerous body than male Jesuits, in popular fiction. “It’ll end in Rome, mark my words else,” the sexton’s wife averred, with some inconsistency, for if Cousin Jem were really a Jesuit, it might not unreasonably have been supposed that Rome was reached already.

Cousin Jem heard the rumours and heard them with intense pleasure : she bowed worse than ever, as old Harry Dray noted with fury, and genuflected profoundly to the three brass plates on the altar. She wore purple in Lent, and red on feasts of martyrs. Cousin Duck, a martyr every day, wore the latter colour in his heavy moustache all the time.

What it would have ended in had Cousin Jem stuck to Gracechurch, cannot be decided : but the example of a friend, Miss Athelstan, of Margaret Street, in London, who had always outdone her in Anglicanism, and wrote letters indicative of a mild scorn of her country doings, put her back up, fired her with ambition to “perform a retreat” : and into retreat she hied. For this purpose she sought, not a community of female Protestant Jesuits, but one of Anglican Benedictines, St. Benedict, as is well known, having belonged to the Church of England.

The result was, however, that Cousin Jem came

out of her retreat with the conviction that St. Benedict belonged to the Church of Rome, and that she would like to. She was away a month or two, and when she returned to the Mount, she had to confess to her brother that she was a Catholic. He had heard her say so for a couple of years, and had attributed it to the weakness of her sex. When he understood that she meant "the real thing," his good-nature deserted him.

"Anything but that, and welcome," he observed, with a tendency to purple that was unrubrical, for it was Paschal time. "Ye've bowed, and I've said nothing: and curtsied to the Communion Table, and I've said nothing. And crossed yerself up hill and down dale: and I've taken no notice. But the Pope I can't do with, and I won't. You and me's to part," he concluded, parting with grammar with the same indifference. And he stuck to it: and poor Cousin Jem had to go. He did not make her go there and then: but in a few weeks the Mount was no longer her home—nor his either, for he withdrew to Wales, and placed himself under the protection of a widow who was only not a dissenter because she deemed dissent vulgar. And Mrs. Major Lloyd, as we understood she liked to be called, took care to guard him from her Popish sister-in-law. As the late widow Ap Ryce was about fifty-five, and hard-featured, and had a temper (which, in the pessimism of modern speech, means a bad one), we can only hope he liked it.

As for Cousin Jem she disappeared—"into," as old Harry Dray tragically put it, "the cesspool of Rome."

To me she was held up as an awful warning, and I

meekly accepted her, in the fullness of time, as an example. She was the only Catholic I ever knew till I was one myself, except Jemmy Kelly, the rag-and-bone man, and Mrs. James Kelly, with whom we did not visit.

Catholicity in a small Protestant town, fifteen miles from Mass, is pursued under difficulties when you only keep a donkey-cart. But Mr. and Mrs. Kelly pursued it, though not hotly. Once a year they drove in some state, and with a timorous apprehension of the state of grace, to Wrexham ; and there, as Mr. Kelly pleasantly put it, they "polished their kettles" ; it was observed that they never swore at the lodgers (they kept a tramps' lodging-house) on their return ; which the tramps attributed to fatigue, but which I think had another explanation. If it were fatigue, Mrs. Kelly must have been tired indeed, for she was apt, on these occasions, to cry a little ; and her mood, in general, was not melting.

"My old woman," Mr. Kelly would explain, not himself unmoved, "don't like to lose her soul. But what's you to do ? There aren't no Mass nearer, and we're monopolists here. The rag-and-bone trade in a cirkwet o' fifteen mile and better is ours. God's so good He'll take us as we are, being as He's made us what we are."

I have never heard anything worse than a language that they may have thought suitable to their company urged against Mr. and Mrs. Kelly ; but I cannot honestly attribute my own conversion to Mrs. Kelly's pointing finger—with a rabbit-skin, inside out and not in its first freshness, depending from it.

## CHAPTER XI

### AN IDYLL AND NO KING

IN a former chapter we spoke of Miss Camilla Galt as having had a romance ; and it left its traces on her. There was nothing melancholy about her, but there seemed to cling to her a vague fragrance, as of one who had suffered, and had not been soured by pain, but made sweeter by it. She must always have been of a sweet and gentle nature, nevertheless there must have been in her also a certain rigidity of principle not so rare, perhaps, in tender, yielding-seeming women as is sometimes supposed. For the breaking of her engagement had been an affair of conscience, and must have been horribly painful to her : no doubt it caused pain to others also, but that she believed, rightly or wrongly, could no more be helped than the suffering to herself.

When her brother Lancelot was a big lad at school he fell dangerously ill, and Camilla, their mother being already dead, went off to nurse him.

For a long time the boy lay in such danger that his sister was quite isolated in the sick-room, seeing no one but the doctor, and the professional nurse who shared her labour : one week Camilla taking the night duty, the next changing it with the nurse. But as Lancelot grew better his friends were one by one

admitted to sit and talk with him, and among them was his greatest friend of all, one of the masters of the school. The Rev. Lucas Hurstbourne was obviously a man with a future before him : at the university he had distinguished himself, and had not given over distinguishing himself since. He was already known as a writer, though perhaps very learned critics did not make much of what he had written. The majority of readers, however, are not specially learned, and Mr. Hurstbourne's books were popular, and kept his name before the public. He was also a fluent preacher, and many people admired his sermons almost as much as they admired him—for he was good-looking, and had a fine presence in the pulpit and out of it.

Lancelot Galt thought him a genius, and instructed his sister to that effect : and she found that her brother's high opinion of his friend was shared by many others, not only among the boys but among the masters as well. Mr. Hurstbourne knew that he was popular, and did not object to it, but he was clever enough not to seem conceited : and accepted a good deal of incense without making too much of it. Lancelot declared that he was only too humble, considering what excellent right he had to think well of himself ; and Camilla was content to take her brother's view of it.

Anyway, Mr. Hurstbourne was really kind to the lad, and encouraged him not to be depressed by the loss of time his long illness had occasioned at rather a critical moment.

"I will coach you, and we must only make up for

lost time," said the master. And he kept his word, so that in a few months Lancelot passed on to the University with a scholarship that argued very well for his future.

"Silverian scholars generally do something afterwards," Mr. Hurstbourne assured Camilla : and Lancelot modestly protested that he would never have gained the scholarship without his friend's help.

"It is very nice of him to say so," Mr. Hurstbourne told Miss Galt, when her brother had left them alone, "but the truth is Lancelot is indebted chiefly to himself. He is brilliant : and I am not the only one that knows it."

This was at Whitehouse, where Mr. Hurstbourne and his late pupil were staying for Christmas. Everybody there was civil to the young clergyman, but he found himself most at ease with Camilla. Mr. Galt did not care for clergymen in general, and it somewhat annoyed him to hear his son attribute these initial successes to his friend's help : it behoved his son to be successful on his own account. As for Miss Jasmine, the schoolmaster was a bit afraid of her. As to sport he knew nothing and cared less, and much as he despised it, he had a misgiving that Lancelot's younger sister laughed at him in secret because he knew very little about dogs, and had only a general classical acquaintance with horses—and chariots.

Even Lancelot's sincere flattery was embarrassing because it was too open : Mr. Hurstbourne could put up with a good deal in that way when administered in judicious privacy.

When clouds of incense were wafted in his direction before Jasmine, Mr. Hurstbourne (with the sensitiveness of genius) suspected a sort of sniff in the young lady, as though the odour were disconcerting to her taste. Mr. Galt objected to incense on principle, and had besides an uneasy sense that his son and heir was making too much of a mere tutor. Mr. Hurstbourne had no money, and Mr. Galt had a good deal : he did not see any use in putting his guest too high. Nevertheless he did not refuse his consent when Camilla came and told him that she had engaged herself to Mr. Hurstbourne, subject to his approval. As the schoolmaster had no money he could not expect to receive much dowry with his bride.

And Mr. Galt had an idea that he and Jasmine would get on very well without his elder daughter. He certainly was not afraid of her : but she was a little too superior, and he suspected her, not indeed of Puseyism, but of lacking that vehement horror of Puseyites which was his own stock-in-trade in the matter of religion.

Mr. Hurstbourne, to do him justice, had not been thinking of money when he proposed to Camilla : he may have thought of it before he fell in love, but he really had fallen in love, and was not particularly sorry when Mr. Galt informed him that his daughter was not an heiress. It would not have suited the young man's ideas that he should have been said to marry for money, even by people who knew nothing about it. As it was, the income she brought him

was hardly more than what he would lose by giving up his fellowship. Of that fellowship, and the loss of it which his marriage would entail he did contrive, in some tactfully indirect fashion, to remind Mr. Galt.

The marriage was not to take place immediately : engagements were apt to be longer in those far-off days when nobody was in quite such hurry as everyone is now. Mr. Hurstbourne and Camilla were to be married just before the Christmas following, nearly twelve months distant.

During part of the long vacation he was again at Whitehouse, as, of course, was Lancelot : and Camilla was very happy with her brother and her betrothed. Mr. Hurstbourne could have been happy even without Lancelot, and Lancelot himself was half tempted to think the engagement that had so greatly delighted him had partly spoiled his friend. There certainly seemed to be occasions when his friend manœuvred a little to get out of his way : and, when he failed, he was hardly so impassioned as he used to be in speaking of Æschylus and Sophocles. Perhaps the prosperous lover's mind was not in perfect tune with supreme tragedy.

Those were the golden days of Camilla's life : and, to her death, the memory of them brought to her odours of summer woods and fields, the breath of laughing zephyrs, and murmur of myriads of winged and living creatures unseen among the high branches of great trees. The old sweet world smiled indulgently upon her youth and hope. But Camilla's hope reached



further than present life and youth : of marriage as a sacrament she had not been taught, but it was in fact as a sacrament that she regarded it, with implicit, untaught faith. The whisper of breeze and tree must mean to her God's benediction or it would be meaningless : the smile of summer was nothing to her except as translating the unseen smile of the Lord of earth and sun. Unless he were Himself the Priest of her marriage, she could not dare to be so happy. As it was she sometimes feared. A gift too high for her, she thought, was being given.

Her lover had no such misgiving. To him it was a natural gift, common to most men and women in all ages, and he did not mind gifts being, if they were, beyond his deserving. If being a good husband would make him deserving of Camilla, he was determined to deserve her. If his happiness was not commonplace, it was not wistful, timorous, doubtful of its credentials. I think Lancelot was partly right in finding his friend less interesting as a prosperous lover than he had been before.

Summer ended, and the long vacation ended when autumn was already begun. Lancelot and his friend went away together : only for about two months. Then they were to return, and a fortnight later Camilla was to be taken away a happy wife.

*Dûs aliter visum.* They came back : and at the end of the fortnight Mr. Hurstbourne went away but Camilla did not go too.

What happened Gracechurch never knew : it was said that only one person, except the two people most

concerned, ever was told : and even she was only told in part.

On the night before her wedding-day—as it should have been—Camilla and her betrothed were sitting together in the fire-lit silence of a room where they were alone, thinking. Presently he asked her why she had so little to say.

“Because I have so much to think of,” she answered, smiling.

“Happy thoughts ? ”

He smiled too, feeling sure they must, like his own, be happy.

“Yes, I wonder if I am *too* happy. I cannot see that I deserve so much.”

“Ah ! Nemesis ! But we are Christian folk and poor Nemesis was a heathen.”

He did not seem afraid of her. But Camilla had as little as he to fear from any heathen goddess. Camilla was not thinking of heathen fates or gods.

“Yes,” she said. “We are Christians : if you knew me, as I know myself, would you think me good enough for the wife of a Christian priest ? ”

He was not addicted to thinking of himself as a priest : the Christian priests whom he chiefly thought of as such have no wives.

“I am sure,” he declared with a mild accession of pomp, “that you are fit to be the wife of any Christian minister.”

“But I am not sure,” she whispered.

Her ideas of a Christian minister had nothing to do with Sophocles or Æschylus, or even with popular,

non-committal sermons that those great men might have listened to with no emotion deeper than a mild conviction of the decadence of philosophy and emotion since their time.

Mr. Hurstbourne was not irritated : he was too prosperously contented. He was not even eloquent—eloquence is mostly angry, wretched, or discontented. he merely said :

“Tut, tut.”

Camilla scarcely heard.

“I will tell you,” she said, in a quiet voice, bending forward and watching a face in the fire. It was changing rapidly, as fire-faces do. At first it had seemed to her like his, and comely as his was : but it grew formless and was gone, before she finished what she wanted to say.

She told him of her faults : of a placid, decorous vanity and self-complacency : of a faith vague at times and faltering : of one awful time in which faith had seemed dead altogether : of a secret love for this present world and its pleasures, and hopes, and trumpery greatnesses that she knew were littlenesses all the while : of selfishness, and self-satisfaction, and of a staid, unscandalous indulgence of self : of pleasure in praise : of liking to be called “good” and charitable : of a thousand spots and blemishes on the mirror of her soul that should only have reflected God, looking in it for the likeness of Himself that He had made.

When she ended the face in the fire was quite gone and her lover’s face was smiling—indulgently. He

was almost touched : it was pretty, but it was not practical.

"And *you*," he cried gallantly, "are not good enough to be my wife ? Let *me* tell *you*."

It did not strike him that he had missed her point : it did not strike her yet. The point had not precisely been whether she were good enough for *him*. She had indeed meant him—thinking of him as of what his calling made him seem to her.

"Let me tell you," he said.

And he told her : some sort of confession like hers. What it was he told she never repeated to anyone. It is not likely that it was anything which the world, or he, would think very bad. He was a perfectly respectable young man, and he was not at all imprudent : he merely failed to conceive her point of view : otherwise he would not have told her.

For seventeen years at least, Gracechurch, in its moments of frequent leisure, exhausted itself in conjecture unbridled by charity or probability. But Gracechurch knew no more about it than I do. All that ever was known was that Camilla Galt found in what he told her something that made him other than the man to whom, on the morrow, she had been ready to vow, before God, not obedience and love only but honour. That vow she would not take. It was the eleventh hour, but in the one hour remaining she must and would save herself.

All that Gracechurch knew was that the morrow came, and with it deep snow, but no wedding. The churchyard paths were swept clear for bridal feet, for the weddings of those days took place early, and the

men were alert betimes and the gates of the churchyard were all far from the church doors : but no bridal party paced them : no wedding-bells had to struggle with the snow-filled air : on the Sunday following, Camilla, who should have been in Italy by then, was in her usual place in the Whitehouse pew, and only the God to whom she prayed knew why she was still there. Many condemned her, knowing nothing : He who knows all things must have pitied her.

The gifted, though discarded, lover relieved himself by a thin volume of verses, commended by the critics more than his former published works, for the excellence of their form and style : some recommended him to stick to poetry and eschew theology, or slightly unhealthy romance : but this advice he did not follow. Numbers were only easy to him in the first sting of injury and reprisal : and by the time he was engaged again, the Muse of Poetry had, with a queer smile, deserted him. The actual Mrs. Hurstbourne had some occasion to complain that the sonnets to Amelia lacked the genuine spirit of the bitter, if sincere, elegiacs on false Camilla. But Mrs. Hurstbourne was better off than the false Camilla, and did not see any particular necessity for her husband's wasting their money in producing lean books of verse at his own expense : and poetry seldom pays its way, as we may conclude from the beautiful story of the publisher who assured the late Mr. Browning that " if Shakespeare, nay if the Prince Consort were to approach him with verses, in the then state of the trade, he would have to say the same firm ' No.' "

Camilla wrote no verses, and never called her Lucas cruel, for she never mentioned his name, and, gentle as she was, no one ever dared mention it to her. For seventeen years she remained Camilla Galt, to the great contentment of many poor and, I daresay, worthless persons. As she could not be happy herself, in the way she had thought of, she simply set herself to making the miserable less miserable so far as her means and her lights showed her. Her father and her sister did not molest her, with advice or question, or fussy sympathy. Her brother never quite forgave her, and she never sought his forgiveness at the price of explanation or self-justification. She had lost her lover, let him keep his friend.

The slow years went by : and many springs and summers came to warn her that love and life went on heedless of one particular shadow on the flowered fields, and one chilled hope in a world that can live by nothing less.

If her lover had had right to complain of her, she, at least, had the greatness to complain of no one : she made no wry faces, and had nothing hard to say of life : a shadow had fallen her way, and she could think of nothing better than trying to lift it a little where it fell harshly on others.

At the end of those patient years she did marry, and, by a twist of fate, or by a gentle guiding of heaven towards humility, she chose another schoolmaster. There was nothing brilliant about Mr. Hartley : his future, as old Miss Dray, with pungent bull, remarked, was all behind him. He was a smallish, dark man,

"without a presence"—as even Miss Broom reluctantly admitted : and he was on the practical side of forty. He had no fellowship, and he was not rich without one. He was not given to raptures about Æschylus or Sophocles, his enthusiasm was all for trigonometry and the higher mathematics. He was a quiet, rather silent man of good character and capacity but without any following of prophetic admirers. As he was not a clergyman he could not preach showy and ornate if somewhat shallow sermons, as Mr. Hurstbourne had done, and his only publication was a short treatise on Conic Sections that did not lend itself to quotation.

It was December when he and Camilla became engaged and early in January they were married. I remember the wedding very well. It did not altogether satisfy Gracechurch, which did not see why Miss Galt, though seven-and-thirty now, should dispense with bridesmaids and have only four mature "attendants" instead. These ladies were all dressed differently, in handsome warm gowns "more indicative" thought Miss Broom "of the austerity of our climate than suggestive of the auspiciousness of the occasion." And they wore bonnets which merely matched their dresses and had nothing precisely bridal about them. But what occasioned most criticism was that the bride herself was not clad in white but in pale lavender silk—"for all the world," said Miss Broom, "as if it had been a second marriage."

The morning was raw and frosty, and "roses rather than lilies"—I apologise for quoting Miss Broom so

often—"decked the noses of the attendants." But Camilla looked serenely happy, and, if her girlish beauty was gone, she was still a fair and sweet bride. There were many poor folk to watch and bid God bless her : they knew well they were losing a patient and steadfast friend.

Gracechurch missed her : and all who spoke of her did so with respect. She had been too shy and reserved for downright popularity, but all were conscious of something high and noble about her. To no one had she ever failed in courtesy, of no one had she ever spoken with sharp wit, or crude and easy criticism. Of herself she had never spoken at all.

About a year after her marriage the elder Miss Dray, then an old woman, was one day reading the paper when she came upon a paragraph that made her cry out and nearly let the gold-rimmed spectacles drop from her high-bridged nose.

"Good gracious ! Harry, what do you think ?" she exclaimed. "Mr. Hurstbourne has been made Head Master of Downchurch School. That's where Mr. Hartley is Mathematical Master. I do think that's hard on Mrs. Hartley."

It was hard on her : he was the only man on earth whom she would dislike to meet : and, though Downchurch School is big and famous, Downchurch is a little place where all the masters and their families must be continually thrown into a sort of necessary, official intimacy. Her marriage had been happy, though not brilliant, and she had been content with



her simple, unimportant lot. It was not pleasant for her to know that her husband must now be under the man whom she had so nearly married : and that she and that man must now be continually meeting.

Everyone at Downschurch knew that she was "cruel Camilla" : but everyone at Downschurch presently bore witness that she bore herself well in the trying circumstances that had befallen her. They were inclined to suspect that the new Head Master had more cause than she to wish he had never published the Camilla poems.

Mrs. Hurstbourne tried to snub her, but she might as well have tried to snub the dome of St. Paul's : she then tried to patronise her, and might as easily have patronised the Matterhorn : finally she became afraid of her, a fact of which Camilla never betrayed the smallest consciousness.

By the time Mr. Hartley was made Professor of Mathematics in the new Midland University people at Downschurch had come to think that he and his wife were entirely indifferent to the presence of Archdeacon and Mrs. Hurstbourne at Downschurch School. But, for all her dignity, Camilla was anything but indifferent.

"Well, all's well that ends well," said Miss Broom, when she heard of Mr. Hartley's promotion. "But it's a pity she married a man with the same initial letter to his name as her first choice. It was sure to bring vexation. 'Change the name and not the letter is change for worse and not for better.' Everyone knows that."

"It was convenient, anyway," said old Miss Dray, "her first trousseau would do for the second wedding without picking out the marking."

"You forget there was seventeen years between : I doubt it was all worn out."

"My memory," observed Miss Dray with asperity, "is as good as ever it was. So is my hearing."

Miss Broom had for many years been a little deaf but would not own it.

## CHAPTER XII

### LESSONS

WHEN I was about nine years old I began to learn Latin, and my tutor taught me "for love"—whether of his pupil, or of someone else, need not here be surmised. In Jacky's school, I had, indeed, got as far as *Mensa, Table or O Table*, but had there abruptly declined further declension, as has been related long ago.

I liked it now pretty well : my teacher was a gentleman and he knew more than Jacky, and was not particularly afraid of seeming to know less. He was patient, and I got on reasonably : but Eutropius did not interest me very deeply, nor did Cornelius Nepos, and I doubt if they would now. Probably I was lazy and impatient. Sometimes the Latin was varied by short essays which allowed me more scope : in fact I allowed myself more scope than my instructor admired. I was given license to choose my own subject, and availed myself of the liberty to express very decided views concerning Oliver Cromwell, Queen Elizabeth, Henry VIII, and William of Orange, whom I regarded merely in reference to their treatment of Charles I, Mary Queen of Scots, Catherine of Aragon, and James II. Mr. Burgoyne

was not sensitively partial to Henry VIII or his illustrious daughter (of virginal memory) : but he had a lamentable weakness for Cromwell and the second-rate Dutchman : and he had an injudicial blindness to the sanctity and halo surrounding Mary Stuart and her grandson—to which latter I clung with peculiar tenacity as the only addition the Church of England had ever made to the calendar on its own account. There was Prayer Book authority for dubbing him Martyr, and to distinguish between martyrdom and sanctity horrified me as a profane application of merely human criticism. When Mr. Burgoyne coldly declared that Charles I was a liar, I instantly resolved to believe nothing further he might amuse himself by telling me as to Latin accident or Roman statesmen. Cicero probably had private reasons for his virtuous abhorrence of Verres and Catiline : and oblique narration might or might not be obligatory in elegant statement. I did not care in the least : but I regretted deeply the impossibility of dying for Mary Stuart or Charles : for choice I would have died first for Henry VIII's first wife (if thus I could have defeated the filthy plot for her divorce), lived again to die for Mary Stuart ; risen a second time merely to lay down my life for her grandson, and faced the fatigues of a third resurrection that I might finally die to save the throne of his second son.

Mr. Burgoyne snubbed these enthusiasms, but he could not quench them. And I revenged myself by heaping obloquy on the hypocritical Protector and on James II's false nephew and son-in-law, Henry VIII

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and Elizabeth were suffered to rest in such peace as might be theirs, since my misguided teacher had so much more to say for Cromwell and William than he had to urge in their favour. Charles I. I regarded as a Catholic debarred from open reconciliation with the Church on account of the badness of his times : that James II was a Catholic out and out was all in his favour. That he failed in bringing back the old religion was a lamentable circumstance that was not his fault, as he obviously did his best. The Church of England I secretly regarded as a well-meaning Locum Tenens much hampered by the Low Church party in it. Between Laudian High Churchmen and Catholics I perceived as yet no difference deeper than that of disagreeable accidents of birth and time. Mr. Burgoyne had a sort of habitual toleration of the Church of England—he had a good baritone voice and sang in the Gracechurch choir, and his father was a Rural Dean : but he did not believe in anything in particular, and, though he always supped at the Rectory after evening church on Sundays, and liked the Rector, and did not dislike the Rector's wife, he disapproved of tithes, and rather thought the better-educated clergy would all be agnostics soon. As for the Church of Rome he considered it to be a circumstance of the Middle Ages, like the plague and feudalism, of no present significance and little present menace. The world had outgrown it and the Pentateuch.

He had never known any Catholics, except a former French governess at the Misses Gibbs' school, who, he understood, had been used to drink sugar and water

at supper, and had conscientious scruples against accompanying those ladies to church, but stayed at home and played Patience.

I knew that Mr. Burgoyne was very kind to me, and I liked him : but our views were too divergent for sympathy. He abhorred sentiment, and through its light-wreathed morning mist I regarded everything then. To this day it seems to me that people are too hard on it : it wears out quickly enough, and the "realities of life" are not always nobler.

Even a little illusion is only a tenderness of atmosphere that fills the horizon with hope, and adds some beauties to landscapes that are like to turn out plain enough. But my Mr. Burgoyne had a brother—he had in fact seven, and the other six dawned on me some years later—and Mr. Paul Burgoyne came to stay at Gracechurch. He was then at Oxford, on the point of taking a degree, which he took, like a pill, some months later. In appearance there was a mild family resemblance between the brothers : in everything else they were totally unlike, except in the fact that both were extremely good to me.

One day it happened that my Mr. Burgoyne—Mr. Clement—had to go off somewhere for the day : and he left word that Mr. Paul was to hear my Latin. We got through it with delightful celerity : Mr. Paul did not seem to think my mistakes mattered much. Then we talked, and I had never enjoyed any conversation so much before. By some subtle instinct of sympathy Mr. Paul knew that the subject he chose would interest me : as it probably would not specially interest most

English boys of ten or eleven. He began to talk about the Church, and Saints, and Sacraments : above all, about the Mass, and he called it so, and our Lady, and he called *her* so. He took for granted, in a charming way, that we were all Catholics, and, as I had always envied those who were, it was something splendid to become aware that I was one already. It bothered me afterwards that Miss Broom and Miss Harry Dray must also be Catholics, and I could not help feeling that the circumstance would be very disagreeable to them if they knew it. At the moment there was more attractive matter for consideration.

Mr. Paul ran upstairs to his room and brought down all sorts of fascinating things—a crucifix of mother o' pearl that came from Palestine, and had fourteen little holes at the back with atoms of holy earth in them : a book of Latin prayers, and another book filled with written prayers, some by himself, others copied from Catholic manuals : prayers to Our Lord's Five Wounds and to the Blessed Sacrament ; some to our Lady and the Saints. They were illustrated, too, with holy pictures : and there was one, loose between the pages, which we knelt down to look at. I thought it the most wonderful, glorious picture I had ever seen. It showed the Sacred Host, surrounded by a cloud of adoring angels, and when it was lifted between our eyes and the light, the White Disguise of the Eucharist was seen no more but only Christ Himself, with patient tender smile.

When I went away the golden mist made the world seem remote and unreal : a cloistered reality had opened and taken me in.

Ah, but how shy poor children are ! It was delightful talking about the Church, and sacraments and saints : more delightful hearing him talk and teach. But of my own queer secrets I could not tell even him : in fact, I felt, blushing, that he would disapprove. For the child he spoke to had done odd things out of his own head, and now he felt half guilty about them.

Long before this I had invented a sacrament for myself : in our garden there was a heap of bricks, and out of it I had built a little altar under the trees, where it could not be seen from the house. On it I offered milk and flowers to our Lady, and received them, as her mystical fragrant food, in sign of being her child.

And there was another thing I had done : and now I shivered to think of it : for it was, perhaps, a liberty and presumption, as when Uzzah touched the Ark because he feared its falling.

Very often I went into our church when it was empty, on weekdays, and was very happy there. The presence of the dead never frightened me ; I liked it : and their being there, who were with God, seemed to bring Him into a sensible nearness to me also. They saw what I tried to see, and knew what I wanted to learn. There were no pictures nor statues, but there were many painted windows which showed Our Lord, His Mother, and many saints. There was the old Lady Chapel, and in it I often prayed to her in whose honour it had been built. Around the stalls of the choir ran a screen in which was a door leading



from the old Lady Chapel to the broad space between stalls and sanctuary. One day, when I was perhaps nine years old, I passed through this door, and came out before the altar-rails, in front of which was a long red cushion : and there I stood looking up at the great life-sized figures of the Apostles in the east window. The rain was beating against it, and the sad wind mixed his moaning with her tears. Presently the rain stopped, and a gleam of sunshine poured in through the plain glass of the Lady Chapel windows behind me. It shone down upon the red cushion on which communicants knelt, and I saw upon it many crumbs. It was Monday and the sexton's wife had not come yet to sweep and dust.

There were many crumbs, and I knew whence they had fallen. It seemed terrible . . . for a long time I hesitated and did not dare to do what I thought was the only thing that could be done.

Then I knelt and worshipped : and on my knees crept down the long, long length of the big church, backwards, and scramblingly, to the far-off western door. There I made my preparation : and slowly crept eastward again till I came to the altar-rails once more : and then, one by one, I picked up those scattered crumbs and received them tremblingly. I was horribly afraid. I had not been confirmed : my official first communion did not take place for four more years : no one ever went to communion without confirmation. But how could those crumbs be left there for the sexton's wife and her pan and brush ? Surely God would not mind. I did it often again :

and, in God's generosity, I hope it counts for reverence and some spiritual communion.

But when I came away, that shining summer morning, from talking with Mr. Paul, I was only afraid and ashamed. It was no ease to me then to remember that I had thought St. Peter and St. Paul, high up in their clear picture, had seemed not to frown.

A week later Mr. Paul was gone : and a week after that my Mr. Burgoyne told me that on the next day I must have a holiday : he was driving to Rentminster, seventeen miles off. And he offered to take me too.

Of course I went. It was a lovely drive : and Rentminster was a fascinating place, with fine old churches, streets that twisted themselves up steep hills, and flung themselves down into queer valleys with the Severn in them ; and most alluring shops. But Mr. Burgoyne had to see a dentist, and let me off seeing him too : so I had an hour to wander about alone, at the end of which I was to meet him at the Golden Keys. My ramblings brought me to a rather large, newish church, with a big house beside it.

"That," explained a passer-by whom I shyly questioned, "is the convent, and that's the Catholic chapel—Cathedral, begging its pardon. For there's a Catholic Bishop of Rentminster."

I eyed the door of the church, and when my informant had passed on, I eyed it more eagerly : my passer-by had his hat on one side, and a second-hand straw in his mouth, and a disagreeable look in his eye of thinking me old-fashioned.

There was a little door in the big one, and it was

half open. I walked in, very nervously : for I was convinced that it was plainly written all over me (in spite of Mr. Paul) that I was not a Catholic. However, the clearest print cannot be read when there is no one to read ; and there was no one outside : the young man with the straw in his mouth had reached the corner of the street (he had a flippant back)—all the same he turned, before disappearing round it, and spat the straw out by way of friendly recognition of our brief acquaintance. I did not regret him : and I crept in.

The church was biggish, but not very big. And a nun was arranging flowers upon the high altar : as she passed before the middle of it she genuflected, and her rosary gave a rather bony clatter. There was also an old woman in one of the side-chapels praying half-aloud in a sort of moaning fashion. Up in the gallery someone was trying tunes on the organ.

Presently a priest came in from a side door and knelt a minute or two before the high-altar, sideways, for he had a presence : and then went to a confessional built in the wall, took out a short surplice, and a very faded purple stole, put them on and went in.

My heart gave a most dismal thump : but I was quite certain there was only one thing to do, and easy or difficult it had to be done. I must confess those crumbs.

I was kneeling a good way from the priest in his confessional : but he leant out and saw me. He was now reading out of a fattish black book with gold edges to the leaves, and he wore glasses which pinched

up the flesh over the bridge of his nose : they fell a little forward and he hitched them back into position by making a sort of frowning grimace. He was elderly, and had shaggy, dark eyebrows and white hair : and my prejudice was in favour of youngish persons. It made no difference : there he was, and there was I. It could not be mere chance. I half rose from my knees, and he nodded, as much as to say, "Come on. Here I am."

My heart was up in my throat, in defiance of all anatomical geography : but I went.

I saw him lean back, and shut his book on a long, rheumatic-looking forefinger. His glasses fell down among his feet and he had to push open the little low doors in front of his knees to find them : he had on a squarish black cap with three humps to it, and it was crooked when he came up.

"Please," I said, standing in front of him, "I want to go to confession."

"So I suppose," he did not say : but he looked. And he nodded sideways as though to bid me go in there under the dark-green rep curtain. So I went. I could now see, through a sheet of perforated zinc, the nape of his neck, and two odd pins that fastened his collar behind. His neck had bushy grey hairs on it, like small whiskers.

"Please I don't know how to begin," I said tremblingly.

"Begin," he suggested mildly, "with the *Confiteor*."

"I don't know it. I don't know much Latin except Cæsar."

He certainly seemed to jump.

"How old are you?"

"Nearly eleven."

"Say it in English. I meant in English."

"I don't know it in English. I don't know what it is. I only wanted to go to confession."

He had given over jumping: but he turned half round, in mild astonishment, so that I lost sight of the pins.

"A boy of eleven should know the *Confiteor* in English, but never mind. Go on."

Suddenly I had a scruple.

"I don't think you know," I said. "But I am not a Catholic."

If anybody's shoulders ever meant "Good gracious!" his did. But he did not say so. He said very little, but it was quite easy to understand: he could not let me go to confession to him. Beyond that he said nothing, and he asked no questions; who I was, whence I came, why I wanted to go to confession, not being a Catholic: nothing. According to all Protestant theories he ought there and then to have made me a Catholic: it did not seem to occur to him.

Perhaps even some who are Catholics may wonder that he held out no helping hand: but I think I know why he did not. He had a clever, learned face, and he was, I have no doubt, learned and clever: he was an elderly theologian, and I was a little ignorant boy of eleven: it would not, I am sure he thought, have been fair. It would have been like turning a field-gun on a child armed with a toy pistol. How could

I have answered anything he might have chosen to say? He knew all about it, as I knew nothing.

Anyway he said nothing and made no attempt to hook a fish that was almost begging to be caught. It may be that he felt a secure conviction that the Fisherman, Whose Vice-Gerent Peter is, would finish Himself what He had plainly begun. I did not stay in the church; indeed it seemed to me, perhaps wrongly, that the priest expected me to go.

I had been horribly afraid of making my confession, though determined to make it: but it was no relief to find I need not make it: I felt only a heavy disappointment.

Outside there was the young man with the straw who was again passing, in the opposite direction this time: but he had not got the straw now, and was chewing a match instead.

"Hulloa! been inside to see what it was like?" he observed with great ease of manner, like an old acquaintance. "I went once of a Sunday evening with the young lady what I walked out alonger then. She said it was entertaining: but I didn't see a lot in it that way. The man as preached knew what to preach about and I found him a bit stinging. We've all sorts here; Uneyetarians and Letter Day Sense and Swedenburgins. Quakers too: and I went and saw a weddin' there: they sat round a table with a green cloth on, and pen and ink, till the spirit moved the hero o' the occasion to arst the heroine to *be* so. Seemingly he'd asked before, and she had her answer ready. . . . Well, I'm off, as the handle said to the jug."

He did not take his hat off in parting salutation, but he shook it over to the other side of his head, and it meant the same thing. I did not regret him even now : still, he was a friendly young man, and seemed to belong to the sunshine and the workaday state of things outside : I was entangled in a sort of inward haze, brighter than the afternoon light, but half wistful. I felt rather lonely, and almost missed him, when his flippant back had disappeared a second time.

At the appointed hour I walked into the yard of the Golden Keys, where Mr. Burgoyne was standing by the dogcart, between the shafts of which an ostler, without coat or hat, was backing Mr. Burgoyne's tall horse.

I was told to get up, and Mr. Burgoyne went off to pay our reckoning.

"Hulloa !" said the ostler when I turned round. It was the young man with the straw. He seemed quite pleased to see me. His waistcoat, I observed, was too loose behind and had a fold in it, fastened with two huge safety-pins.

Perhaps my recognition of our acquaintance struck him as cold.

"Down on your luck ?" he inquired with cheerful solicitude, buckling a little strap. There was that in his manner which suggested that he too thought me old-fashioned.

"Not particularly," I replied—not intimately.

"Dismal dispersition, p'r'aps ?" he suggested very intimately indeed.

"I have rather a headache," I admitted.

"Ah ! It's mornins' *I* have 'em, and not often then. Here's your governor."

Mr. Burgoyne administered a tip, and stepped up beside me.

The young man with the straw (he had another) came round and tucked the rug round my feet : as we moved off he jerked a thumb upwards, and his thumb had all the flippancy of his back.

"Meet again somewhere, I hope," he said, aside.

We never have yet : but I hope we may.

Our homeward drive was rather silent. Mr. Burgoyne thought I was tired. I was thinking of my first interview with a Catholic priest.

The next time I fell in with one was in a train, a year later. I was going over to Ireland, and at Chester got into the Irish Mail. All the carriages seemed full, and I had been running up and down looking for a place.

Presently a tall priest came to me and said, "You're looking for a place ? The train will be off in a minute. There's one in our carriage."

"It's very kind of you," I said, as he led me towards his carriage.

"Oh," he answered laughingly, "it is the Cardinal you must thank. It was he that saw you running up and down, and he sent me after you."

The carriage was nearly full : there was an old gentleman with ear-ache, who covered his head with the *Pall Mall Gazette* to keep off draughts before he went to sleep. There was the Cardinal—I knew him



by his scarlet stock and by the deference the others paid to him—and there were three priests. The vacant place was next to the Cardinal and he settled me into it with a gentle smiling kindness.

He talked a little too, asking me if I were Irish.

“Half,” I answered.

“Half a loaf’s better than no bread,” declared his Eminence.

It was, as I found out afterwards, the great Cardinal Paul Cullen. He was exceedingly kind to me : and so were the other priests, all the way to Holyhead. But on that occasion I made no suggestion with reference to confession.

Six years after that I came across another priest. I was at school then, in the Midlands, and, one half-holiday, I walked over to Alton, as I had often done, to say my prayers in the Catholic church there. This time another sixth-form boy was with me : deeply Anglican like myself. He thought it slightly wicked praying in “Roman” churches, and revenged himself by a heated argument with a sort of female sacristan who was cleaning lamps.

Presently the priest came in and overheard, as he might easily have done, for the disputants did not whisper. His reproof was short rather than sweet : and it conveyed a clear intimation that our departure would be esteemed a favour.

“Never mind um,” whispered the lady of the lamps in my ear. “He’s a grand priest : but English. It’s just his way. He’s as gentle as a lamb. All the same ye’re Prodestants the two of ye : and the other

one'll *be* a Prodestant and die in it. *You* won't. So there's luck to ye, and see if it don't come to ye."

I knew that priest well, many years after that : and loved him dearly. He was one of the best and tenderest preachers I ever heard. He lived in London then, and one day, in his house, I chaffed him, saying how a cross priest at Alton, long ago, had driven me scowlingly out of his church. He remembered, though he had quite forgotten *me*.

"So you were the jackanapes," he answered cheerfully. "It did you good. It taught you what you were."

Perhaps it had helped to teach me what I wasn't. But it cannot be said that any priest I ever met before I was a Catholic tried to haul me, willy nilly, into the Church.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A WEDDING AND SEXTUS

HAVING always as a child been, or been considered, delicate in health, I did not leave home to go to any kind of school until I was twelve years old. And, at first, though I went far enough, it was not to a regular school. Mr. Burgoyne's father, the Rural Dean, had for many years had a number of pupils ; when I went to him there were, beside myself, only two, his own youngest son Hector, and a boy called Bradford. We went in the last days of December, and the horrible pang of leaving home was lessened by the fact that my mother took me. My Mr. Burgoyne was at Graydown already, having gone there to keep Christmas with his family. He met us at Castle Compton station, a mile and a half from Graydown, with a venerable pony-chaise drawn by a coeval white pony : even if it had not been snowing we should have been white too by the time we got to the Rural Deanery, for Nellie (her full name was Eleanor of Castile) had a liberal habit of casting her hair upon the breeze. Of course it was not called the Rural Deanery : it was simply Graydown Vicarage : a very big house, like a squire's, with an austere bell-tower. It stood high, with a wide view, on the

flat top of a hill that was now all white in the early dusk. We had a long journey, right across England, for Clayshire and Rentshire are as far apart as any two Midland counties can be. I am never quite sure if a border county like Rentshire can be reckoned midland.

My first impression of Clayshire was that it was very cold : the fields were huge, and the hedges were scarcely visible under deep drifts of snow. There were churches everywhere : never more than a mile apart : beautiful old churches, Saxon, Norman, and all manner of Gothic : but they looked black and bleak with the empty white land all about them.

My Mr. Burgoyne, who had never been anything more familiar, was hardly recognisable as "Clem." And when his mother bade him shut the door I was almost as much startled as the lady who heard Pitt's mother say to him, "Billy, put coals on."

I had to call him Mr. Clem. And there was Mr. Humphrey : almost flippantly like him ; and there was Mr. Bob, and there was Mr. Cyrus ; and there were four Miss Burgoynes—Miss Philippa, Miss Muriel, Miss Helena, and Miss Stephanotis. But fortunately the last of them was only fourteen and was merely Steevie : she did her lessons with us, and thought Longfellow a great poet : as did I. We knew no better, poor things.

Miss Muriel, the second, was the pretty one, and knew it : Miss Burgoyne was clever, or I daresay she would have been a pretty one too. She had good features, and an alert manner like a starling's. Dr.

O

Burgoyne was an old gentleman, and had very courtly ways, which were supposed to be due to his residence as a young man in France. He talked French very well—and oftener than I liked, who could not talk it at all : and he had so much accent when he talked it that I despaired at once. He was the kindest and most generous of men : nevertheless he frightened me a little : he had caned, I suppose, a procession of boys extending along about thirty years. When you construed to him he would not have a book of his own but knew what was coming : a fearful habit.

He was very particular about manners, and dropped on you if you took your hat off on the wrong side—with the hand next the Doctor of Divinity you were saluting. When you rushed to open a door for him he would with mild compassion (worse than scorn) make you pretend you were leaving the room, and open the door for you himself in the proper way, with the only sort of bow admissible among civilised persons. The doctor was also highly nervous, and I shudder at this moment to remember how he shouted when, in dashing forward to hand him a pencil, I knocked a short form over with a noisy crash. It seemed that he knew of a case of the kind in which the form had broken a boy's ankle : the fact that no one's ankle was injured on the present occasion had, of course, no logical bearing on the matter.

In the morning we rose at seven and learned lessons by ourselves for an hour before breakfast, in what was now the schoolroom, but had been the nursery : a room all papered over with pictures from the *Illustrated*

*London News.* The bedroom in which Hector Burgoyne, Bradford, and I slept, opened out of it. Over my bed I hung a crucifix and a medallion head of our Lady, which Mrs. Burgoyne surveyed without comment, if without approval : but which her eldest daughter did not suffer herself to behold without criticism. Bradford, on our first visit together to Northampton, borrowed half-a-crown from me to purchase a crucifix for himself, and informed me that he was much higher church than I was, really. His crucifix was marked one-and-six at the back, but he generously shared with me the toffee on which he spent the balance, and of course I made no remark.

After breakfast we betook ourselves to the kitchen, where we said our "repetition" to Mrs. Burgoyne while she trimmed the lamps, arrayed in a stiff print overall. Repetition consisted of Rules and examples from Latin Syntax, and certain outrageous verses such as

Common are to either sex  
Artifex and opifex.

I still prefer Longfellow.

From half-past nine to half-past twelve Dr. Burgoyne took us in hand : and I am sure he had every ground for thinking me a stupid little boy, though he never said so.

At one we dined, and immediately afterwards (when the snow was gone) sallied forth brook-jumping : a fascinating employment. That part of Clayshire abounded in wide and deep brooks, very serpentine in

their course, with hollow banks. You stuck your pole in the middle of the brook and hoisted yourself over, or stuck in mid-air. Another pleasure of ours was to go across country on the tops of the high loose-stone walls with which the huge fields were mostly fenced. It was a point of honour never to descend to earth, and never to come down when chased by an irate farmer. Perhaps the farmer was not so angry as he pretended, for though he knew who we were he never lodged complaints with the doctor. About five we had tea, then an hour's lesson, after which Miss Helena read aloud to us—one book was peculiarly enthralling, it was called *Lilian's Golden Hours*, and had for hero and heroine a singularly dangerous boy and girl who ran themselves into six hundred closely printed pages of hair-breadth escapes and out again. I should like to read it all again now.

But my first school-days have nothing to do with Gracechurch, where a romance was brewing, all unsuspected by me, which concerned myself pretty closely. Of that presently.

Meanwhile I was very happy, and at the same time devoured with home-sickness. The sight of the railway brought a lump into my throat, for along those iron lines lay the road home. My mother only stayed a day or two, and when "Mr. Clem" went away too, a week later, the last link with Gracechurch seemed broken : or the last but one, for there remained an immense cake, like a cheese, that Colonel Grace had given me. When we ate the last four pieces, Bradford observed :

"Well, it's lasted a good while." And Hector remarked that he would like to know Colonel Grace himself. But I think Steevie was aware that my own last mouthful was hard to swallow. A cake that had been baked in a Gracechurch oven was more than a cake to me.

Winter passed away and spring seemed to arrive with a jump on the first of April: just before dinner on that day I came across Dr. Burgoyne in the kitchen garden, and he saluted me with especial urbanity, or rather returned my salute, which was on the right side now.

"Have you been told," he asked, "to expect a visitor?"

He lifted, as he spoke, the lid off a sea-kale pan, and peeped in with a smile that struck me as rather arch.

"A visitor, sir? What visitor?"

"Ah! that's what you must guess. What visitor would you like best?"

"My mother," I gasped excitedly.

"You soon guessed." He said, with another smile into the sea-kale pan, "Should you guess *to-day*?"

To-day! My mother, to-day! when I had not dreamt of seeing her till the holidays in July! Then I remembered the day, and my poor little heart fell chill.

"Ah, sir," I expostulated meekly, "it's after twelve: April Fool after twelve doesn't count."

The doctor lifted his head sharply from the sea-kale pan, so sharply that his hat went on one side.

"Good ('gracious' he was going to say) . . . My good boy, do you think I could be so cruel!"



And the doctor trotted off quite in a fume down the path between the gooseberry-bushes. Eleanor of Castile was in the spinney and she surveyed him over the hedge with sympathy : she had seen him warm before, and she had known boys for nearly thirty years. But the doctor trotted back again.

"Go in, Gracechurch friend, go in and ask Mrs. Burgoyne. But it's true, though. April Fool, indeed !"

The doctor made a point of not remembering our names, and he always called me Gracechurch friend, which, I suppose, was easier to remember.

I went in, and it *was* true. My mother was coming by the half-past four train : but Mrs. Burgoyne had meant to send me in the pony-chaise to the station to meet her, for a surprise.

"However," she said, "the doctor has let the cat out of the bag, and we can't put her in again now."

I flew to tell Sextus. Sextus was the sixth son of the doctor and Mrs. Burgoyne, and I liked him best of them all. He had supervened about a month before : all the other Mr. Burgoynes had gone away soon after Christmas. Sextus was a sailor, and I have liked sailors for his sake ever since. He was only nineteen and was not so clever, I think, as all his elder brothers : at all events he said so, and it never occurred to me to doubt anything he told me, though he told me a good deal. Most of the things borrowed by Captain Marryat and enshrined in fiction had really *happened* to him. And what made them much more fascinating was that Sextus only told the most thrilling

of them to me : those he told in public to his parents and Miss Burgoyne were comparatively jejune, and might have happened to anybody.

"You've often surprised *me*, Sextus," I told him mysteriously when I had found him, slinging a hammock between two trees in the spinney. "Now I'm going to surprise *you*."

"Are you, Johnnie ? You try," he said.

He had a very kind smile : and, though his eldest sister deemed him rough, he was, I thought, the gentlest of his sex.

"My mother," I began : but his smile deepened to a grin : and I saw he knew already. I didn't mind : it was a very nice grin.

"You *are* glad," he said simply. He did not know my mother : but he took her for granted, and all the eloquence in the world could not have been more sympathetic.

"So they've told you all about it ?" He added presently, "and you know why she's coming ?"

"To see me, of course."

"Of course. Oh yes. . . ."

Had I not been so fond of Sextus I should have thought him a little stupid not to understand that.

"You know Clem is coming too ?" he observed, absent-mindedly throwing a lump of clay at a black-bird who scuttled off in much pretended alarm, but was really wondering if he knew where her half-finished nest was.

"No, is he ?"

I replied with ungrateful indifference. Of course I

should be glad to see Mr. Clem again : especially as he came from Gracechurch : but I was not thinking of him.

“Is he coming at half-past four ?” I asked.

“No, not to-day. Not till Monday. You like Clem, don’t you ?”

“Oh yes : of course.”

“I don’t know much about him, you see,” said Sextus. There were several brothers between him and Mr. Clem, and Sextus had gone off to be a sailor when he was thirteen.

Sextus seemed preoccupied—a little : and not *quite* so glad my mother was coming as I should have expected. I delicately hinted this.

“Yes I *am*,” he maintained stoutly. “It’s enough to make any fellow glad to see how glad *you* are. I never *saw* anyone so glad about anything : never.”

That was quite unobjectionable. Other people had mothers, no doubt ; but they had not got *my* mother.

It was not till the next day that my mother told me why Mr. Clem was coming too. I had never dreamed of such a thing. But I was delighted.

“So you don’t mind ?” said Sextus when I told him. “I rather wondered.”

(I told him as a secret, but he had known before I knew.)

“Mind ? No. Why should I mind ?”

“You and she have been so much to each other,” he tried to explain, rather awkwardly . . . and I never did him justice for the tenderness of his doubt. Of course she and I had been everything to each other :

and now was I to be troubled by the arrival of a mere husband ?

"Anyway he's devoted to you ?" remarked Sextus. "They all say so."

"Oh yes," I replied with serene vanity, "he knew me first. It was through me they got to know each other."

So one Gracechurch romance really ended in a wedding, and I was present at it. My mother, in her soft lavender silks, looked lovely, and I was as proud and pleased as if it had all been arranged by me. God knows she had had sorrow enough, and if an aftermath of gentle prosperity and happiness was now to be reaped by her, she deserved it all ; and I, at least, could see nothing but cause for joy in it.

But I was glad, when my mother and her husband had gone away, that there was Sextus : otherwise I should have felt almost as lonely and home-sick as when she went away the first time, on that second of January that now seemed so far back in the past. There was quite an exodus after the wedding : my brothers had been there, and all the Mr. Burgoynes, and they all left on the same day. Bradford did not come back after the Easter holidays, and Hector went away to a big school. Till Sextus rejoined his ship I did not miss them much. But at last that frightful day came too, and after two good-byes indoors, and one at the front door, I ran down the back garden to get a last glimpse of him as his father drove him to the station : for there was a wicket-gate there leading into the village street. He smiled and waved his big

brown hand, and was pleased, I think, that I had come for that last look at him. I knew I should never see him again, as well as if he had *intended* then to come back no more to England and settle down for life at the antipodes. It was a day of bright and heartless sunshine, and the air was full of the smell of hawthorn-bloom : the scent of it always makes me think of Sextus.

We have never met since : but there is the golden bridge of absence on which we can go out to meet our unchanged friends, who are never any older—Sextus is over sixty now : *sixty*, what nonsense ! And there he stands, always nineteen, gay and kindly.

And time is busily building that other bridge, whose further end rests beyond the narrow chill water girding this world : crossing that presently, I make sure of seeing Sextus again, and I do not think the Master of that new country will have borne heavily on him for the daring tales he told me—there was never anything in them to make me do more than glow with admiration and wonder : if the child to whom he talked had been a little sister he could not have shown a greater reverence. Never in all he told was there one hint that could have clouded the child's mind with misgiving, or set it wandering along paths that led downward : my sailor's ship of fancy cruised in no puddled waters, but only carried us far over the great, heroic, clean, fathomless ocean.

"Johnnie," he asked me one day, "who do you pray for when you say your prayers ?"

"Everybody," I replied compendiously.

"Mr. Plagram, for instance?"

Mr. Plagram lived with his two old sisters, Miss Bessie and Miss Eunice, in the farmhouse opposite the vicarage front-gate.

"Yes. He said last time I saw him: 'Please God I live so long's harvest's o'er I'll muck the near close.' I pray, since, that he *may* live; it's easy to see he wants to."

"How about present company?"

That meant himself: and it was not quite fair.

"That you may always stop exactly like what you are now," I replied more shyly.

Sextus knocked the head off a thistle with his stick, doubtfully.

"Well: it's very kind of you to think so," he said, "but I don't know that you'd better put it that way."

He was too shy to say how I had better put it: but he meant, I know, that it would be as well if it were asked on his behalf that he should be all I thought him. He was a very humble person, Sextus.

"Carry on, anyway," he begged.

And I said: "Of course."

That was our only theological conversation: nevertheless I was sure that he was very good.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL

AT midsummer I left Dr. Burgoyne, to return no more as a pupil: nor did I go away to any other school till after Christmas. The early autumn was spent in Ireland among my mother's relations; the rest of it, and the first half of the winter, I was, to my delight, at home in my beloved Gracechurch. Absence from it for half a year had made it dearer than ever. Two great events had taken place while I was away: a new family had taken the Mount, where once old Mrs. Tudor had lived with her son Llewelyn, whence, later on, Cousin Jem had gone off to make the retreat which landed her "in Rome": and the parish had sustained a Mission—on the whole pretty calmly.

Of course I soon heard of both occurrences, and, indeed, I saw the new tenants of the Mount at "Early Service" the day after my return. They nearly doubled the congregation. Without adding to the male population of Gracechurch, they gave us five more ladies. There was, naturally, a widowed mother; and, though she had only two permanently visible daughters (there was a married one who lived near Liverpool) she had an unmarried sister, and "a lady friend who resided

with her," what in these vulgar days would be called a paying-guest. Mrs. Leland looked about seventy, and was perhaps a little more : Miss Swinkin was full ten years younger : Miss Toft bridged the gulf between : and the Miss Lelands were of a suitable age. The elder, Miss Maretta, called herself (jocularly, of course) an old maid. Miss Alicia did not yet venture on such pleasantries. The whole family was *churchy*, but only Miss Marretta was genuinely High Church, without being in the least ritualistic. It was darkly whispered that she went to Confession, though no one believed it could be done on the spot : some leant to the opinion that she "went" to Mr. Smollett at Pentrehiland, others that she betook herself to Graceminster. She never said anything about it herself.

None of the other ladies of the Mount carried things so far : but Miss Alicia embroidered stoles, and her mother, aunt, and Miss Toft begged wastepaper, which they collected to buy a new altar-cloth with. In their last parish they had collected enough to provide an altar-cloth that cost forty pounds. "It had," Miss Leland explained, "St. Raphael in the middle."

Old Harry Dray was furious when she heard of it. Saints were all objectionable, but a Roman Catholic painter, who had been no better than he should be, what on earth business had *he* on the front of a Communion Table ?

Miss Dray chuckled and said, "He was an Archangel : it's a pity you never read the Apocrypha."

When her sister understood, she would not admit



the circumstance as greatly extenuating : an archangel out of the Apocrypha was almost worse than an artist out of Italy. "The painter had *existed*, but the other," she argued, "was a fabulous monster."

Harry Dray had not approved of the Mission : "It was given by a lean fellow, in glittering spectacles, who had the indecency to call himself Father Smart, and worshipped the Communion Table on his stomach." Thus she summarised his enormities, and all Pimpley was on her side : that end of the town, including Scotland Street, was never so *churchy* as our end. Its theological thermometer never rose much above zero : the Church Street temperature was well over freezing-point. And our end of the town seemed less vehemently opposed to a moderate spiritual shaking up.

The Mission had taken place in Lent, and was over months before my return for the summer holidays, but it had left visible traces. Several ladies now bowed to the altar ; and the Mount, as a family, ate cold meat on Fridays, only Miss Leland confined herself to poached eggs and macaroni and cheese. Miss Toft, of a bilious habit, deplored it, but respectfully. In her young days, she argued, it was not expected of anyone to upset their digestive organs once a week. "But," she said with some pride, "Maretta would do what she thought right if the Queen tried to argue her out of it."

The services in church were not markedly more "advanced" : a white stole (presented by Miss Alicia) was only worn on week-days—I saw it first on the Feast of St. James the Apostle—and the candles on

the altar remained unlighted. But the Mission had left other signs of its having affected a good many of our ladies. There had arisen quite a fashion of District Visiting. Even the eldest Miss Grace took a district, reserving the right to poach on others, which was conceded in view of what Miss Gibbs called "her situation"—rather like Miss Bella Black in *The Inheritance*. But Miss Gibbs did not mean that Miss Grace was engaged to be married, everybody knew she was too young; it was understood that the allusion was to the vice-regal position of Colonel Grace as representing his cousin the Marquess.

There were so many volunteers that the districts in and near the town would not go round, and some of the ladies had to be a sort of rural postmen. My mother was one, and her district was the Duke's Woods, and her *visitees*, if not numerous, were widely scattered. She took me as a curate, and I had to sally forth in search of poverty and a disposition to be read aloud to. In the town several scandalous instances of unsuspected impecuniosity were unearthed, and even old Mrs. Thorn rummaged up flannel-petticoats and long-treasured clothing of poor Nandy's to meet such cases. Though not of the church end of the town, she had attended the Mission till the Rev. Austin Smart had preached feelingly on the "Widow's Son of Nain." She had then left the church, not, like Miss Bolo, in a flood of tears and a Sedan chair, but in the tears and her handsome Maltese lace veil, with a handkerchief interposed. She told me about it. "Poor man," she whimpered, "he meant no harm. *He* never knew there

was a widow there as the Lord had taken her only son. I couldn't face to go again. But any bits of things my lad left they're welcome to : it's better poor bodies should feel the good o' them, than let them lie folded up in the drawers *he'll* never open again ; eh, Johnnie, there was one suit as I can remember the day he wore it first. A summer's day, like this : and I can smell the same flowers in the wind now, and God knows what good they are, out in the garden where my lad and lass played so innocent, and both gone. The widow *he* preached of had only a lad, and he came back to her : but my lass and lad are both taken and I doubt the Lord'll keep 'em both. I shall go to them, Johnnie, but they'll never come again to me. Eh, if the Lord would let me see 'em once, if it was only once, as they used to be. I sit here, and I think : knitting's no defence : and I can mind them as they was, but never, never can I think of them as I should : nor Mr. Thorn either. Angels ; I cannot think of Mr. Thorn, and Nandy and his sister like that . . . but I can't think of their father bringing them presents, and of Nandy sitting there, and you too, with your little head against the paper, on the stool, and my poor lad as never hurt *me*. . . . But if the poor empty clothes can cheer someone, let 'em go : I thought never to touch 'em : it was hard to take 'em out, and think of my straight lad standin' up in 'em as lies cold now ; you know *he'd* like some other lad to get the good of 'em, and never to think of him that Davy Prigg made 'em for : and Davy's alive (and a great-grandfather), only Nandy's gone, and, old as I am, no grandchild

for me. But the Lord's got my lad, and what's the good o' keeping the things he'll never wear again? Eh, Johnnie! It's my wonder you can bear to come to this dead house, and have patience . . . but Nandy's child you were, and Nandy thanks you for it. Tell your mother I've good clothes left, and, if any in her districk wants them, I'd liever she had them than any of the town visitors. It'd hurt me seeing his clothes on anyone, and out there in the woods I *niver* should. And there's a gown o' my girl's, fit for anyone, as that Irishwoman shall have, your mother found in her districking. You tell her. I thought never to part with it. 'Twas the one she had on when *he* came to propose: but that Irish creature shall have it, and if she's luckier in it than my own lass, let the Lord be thanked. Nandy was there once, at Queenstown, ashore from a yacht, and it was early morning, and he saw an old beggar-body sittin' on a church-step waitin' to go in. But it wasn't open, and he gave her a trifle and said he'd find the clerk (if it's clerks they have in that religion) and make him let her in, for she was dressed mostly i' rags, and it was a drizzly mornin' and the wind chilly; how he found the clerk I don't know, but he did, and he gave *him* something too, and soon the church was open. And the old body blest him, 'You've opened this holy door for me,' says she, 'and St. Peter'll open the gates of Heaven to you and yours.' Our English poor folk'd never think to say a thing like that. Nandy liked the Irish, and your mother shall have that good gown for the Irish body she's found in her districk."

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I was glad my dear old friend's sad thoughts had wandered off to the Irish, but no subject could ever carry them far from her boy.

"Eh, Johnnie, . . ." she said presently, beginning and pausing, as if what she had to say would not come out easily. It was July, and the open window let in the warm sweet air from the garden, where, for her, two figures, of many ages, were always haunting : but we sat by the cold, bright-polished fireplace, and she looked in among the hard, black coals just as in the old days, when she had hardly ever looked at me or Nandy, but would keep her eyes fixed on the throbbing red heart of the fire.

"Eh, Johnnie . . . I'd bide outside if the gate would open quicker for my lad. 'For you and yours,' that beggar body said. And . . . And . . . it's a thing I could say to no one only you . . . I'd forgive Mrs. Sellar, Kezia Thorn as was, his aunt, if it'd help *him* anyways. Would it, think you ? *Could* it ?"

I knew well all about Miss Thorn, all that has been told long ago in the first of these papers ; a hundred times I had seen the sisters-in-law together, and had always felt the invincible antipathy in the air on every such occasion.

I do not think she expected any answer : only her old withered hand felt for mine, and for some wordless sign of encouragement in a hard, hard endeavour. The next time I went to Thorn Croft I met Mrs. Sellar coming out. She always treated me as though I were grown up, and she bowed and half curtseyed. I could see she was uneasy and agitated :

her noddings and mouthings were more exaggerated than usual, and her hands fluttered like a pair of green butterflies.

“And how’s your Mamma? My compliments! Mrs. Sellar’s to Mrs. Ayscough: Mrs. Burgoyne, you understand. . . .”

And with many more noddings and waverings she flitted guiltily down the paved walk to the gate, as if fully conscious that her sister-in-law could see all from the window.

I found Mrs. Thorn standing by the fireplace, with one hand on the chimney-piece, and she smiled a little as our eyes met.

“Poor Kezia Thorn!” she said, with a slight lifting of a finger towards her forehead, “she shows her age. Not in health. I think she gets stronger in the body every year, as some of us grow weaker. She holds herself a deal better than most of the young ones. But her wits run from her quicker and quicker, and she can never run quick enough after them to catch ’em up. I’ve done my best at last; ’twas hard—she couldn’t understand what I was labouring at. But we parted friendlier than we ever did yet, and we’ve been kin more than forty year. We kissed, and you know, Johnnie, I’m none of the kissing sort. It looked queer in the looking-glass . . . !”

We both looked into the glass, as if expecting to see the odd picture there still, and our eyes met there, and we both laughed a little.

“It seems wonderful now,” my old friend confessed, “to have been so hard-made-up against such a crazy

body for forty years. I hope the Lord'll not be forty year forgiving my lad. But, eh! she has had the way to turn my stomach. When my girl was taken she came, and sat, and flashed her handkerchief all about, and said as p'raps it was *ordained* for the best, Dr. Hart being of no family, no ways equal to a Thorn. Not as *I* ever wanted the marriage: but I suppose she didn't stop to think what *my* family was, or me either, and Mr. Thorn and me was happier together than if I'd been a lady, like that Miss Pratt, Sir Welbore Pratt's daughter as married the dancing-master, and died in her first confinement o' twins, as I made Mr. Thorn pay the schoolin'. And when Nandy went she came again, in a deep mourning and a green veil, and said how her yard-dog had howled all night, a sure sign the head of the family was gone or going. 'And I thought you'd be pleased to hear,' says she, bobbin' up and down in the chair. 'For Nandy *was* the head o' the family, and the house-dog always *has* howled for generations when he was to be taken: it's only in old families like the Thorn's such things are. Rich as they are now, there's no howling when a Togson of Togg Hall dies.' 'Twas hard to bear wi', and my only lad lying dead over our heads: as if it was his family his mother was thinkin' of, and that crazy, bobbin' witch all that was left of Thorns or family. And she put up a monument to him in the garden at Kimhill, not far from the monuments to Ponto and Dido, her dead dogs, only a bit bigger. Crosses theirs was: and a round-topped slab his, to make more room for the inscription, says

she, 'Erected by his Beloved Aunt' (and he could never bide to stay in the room with her) 'to the Honourable Memory of Ferdinando, only son of Ferdinando Thorn, Lord of the Manor of Dudham, in this County, who died unmarried, last Male Heir of an Ancient House.' She took me to see it, and pretended it was a new azalea I was to look at : well, it's all over and done now, and I've been a fool feelin' so stiff against one as the Lord chose should be—what she was. And hard too : for, if He's taken my lad and lass away, He *sent* them, and she never had any : and He gave me a good husband as loved me true, and me him : and she niver had aught but Lawyer Kim as took her to get her money, and is alive now to scold and scoff at her."

The old habit of fifty years, the old rancours, would out, but my kindly friend had really won her victory.

"How I moither on !" said she. "But you'll partly understand. And I do trusten as the Lord will, too. Poor Kezia Thorn ! She was as handsome as any of the Thorns, and they were all well-featured : and, cracked as she is, a lady, as you can see still. I always envied her that : and that, maybe, was behind all my fury at her. With all her bobbin' and curtseying none could doubt but she was a born lady. Money shows that—and Lettice had her own fortune, and left it all to me : and Nandy left all to me ; and never a word or a question did yon crazy body ever offer to put as to how the money was. Lawyer Kim keeps a tight fist on all *she* brought him, but never a hint has she ever dropped as any of the money her family left me



should rightly come her way. It's a strange thing bein' a lady ; and what money or marriage won't do for you, nor learning of it : it niver came between me and Mr. Thorn, nor between me and his children, but it was there—the difference, I mean : and if they hadn't all been so good it *would* ha' come between us. Poor Kezia ! Well, we're friends, as have been enemies so long ; it was hard makin' her understand. When she did understand, she was for beggin' my pardon (all in a shake and a flutter, and her bracelets rattlin' like chains on her arms)—and she cried a bit, and dabbed her eyes with her veil ; 'twas all about an old prank of hers that don't matter now. But when she got to that I couldn't bear it, and cut her short, so as she was frightened, and started whimpering, 'Ah, you can't forgive me, Sarah, after all,' says she, 'I knew you never could.' I just gave her a push and told her it was *her* pardon I was after, and then she cried worse than ever—that's how we came to kiss, I suppose."

I have always thought from something Mrs. Thorn said that this reconciliation was one of the results of the Mission ; but it has carried me far from the District Visiting, and farther still from the Mount and its new tenants.

Mrs. Leland and her family kindled quite a conflagration of tea-parties, for they were great entertainers. In the summer they gave Spelling Bees—I do not know if that is spelled properly—which were held in the garden, Miss Alicia officiating with a penny washing-book nearly filled with difficult words. Some

of our ladies thought it hardly fair that she should have all the dictionary to choose from, and copy them out of, while they of course were not allowed to bring dictionaries out of which to provide the "answers"; Miss Broom, and her sister, Mrs. Darrell, of Overton Lodge, only accepted on condition that they were not called upon to spell anything: Miss Broom alleging a weakness of the heart, and Mrs. Darrell pleading that, since her husband's death, her sight had only permitted her to be read aloud to—which might naturally lead her into a tendency to phonetic spelling. We all sat round under the big mulberry-tree, Miss Alicia standing up in the midst with her book in one hand, and a clean pocket-handkerchief in the other. Some of the ladies knitted, but those who had on new gloves preferred not to be taking them off and putting them on. Presently Miss Alicia would charge herself with a word, and fire it off, as she flung the handkerchief into somebody's lap.

"'Camelopard!'"

"Oh! Beast!" cried Miss Murdstone, the first victim, "one, two, three, four . . ." We all understood that she was thinking of a game called Earth, Air, Fire and Water, in which also a handkerchief was thrown.

"No, my dear, *spell* it," suggested Mrs. Leland, with purring remonstrance.

["I could never spell 'Wednesday' if anyone threw things at me while I was writing a note," a Miss Shrimpton next me confessed in a loud aside.]

"'Parallelogram,'" demanded Miss Alicia, launching

the handkerchief reproachfully at the culprit—it was against the rules to talk except in reply to a question.

“There! I know there’s only one L where there ought to be two. P, A, R, O, L, O, L, L, G, R, A, M—or double M.”

“A bad mark,” said Miss Alicia, with mild satisfaction, writing one down against Miss Shrimpton’s name in her accusing record.

“I thought it *sounded* queer,” murmured Mrs. Darrell, secure in her own immunity from interrogation.

“All words *sound* queer when you spell ‘em out loud,” protested Miss Shrimpton, willing, like the lawyer, to justify herself.

“‘Witenagemote!’” Miss Alicia called out, turning smartly on the youngest Miss Windsor, who was watching the arrangement of tea by the maids, through the open dining-room windows.

“Is that a word?” she asked, with helpless appeal.

“Oh, certainly,” said Miss Broom, enjoying herself vastly, and indifferent as to the orthography of the term. “King Alfred, you know . . . There is something very literary and elevating about a Spelling Bee, I think,” she added, bowing to her neighbour, Miss Gingham.

But Miss Windsor objected strenuously to Witenagemote and demanded “another.”

“Calender—a man who gets up chintzes,” said Miss Alicia, conceding the point with indulgent dignity.

“Gets up where?” asked Mrs. Darrell, who was

muffled rather closely about the ears, being unused to sit out of doors for pleasure.

"Chintzes," explained the erudite Miss Gibbs, regretful that the word had not been flung at *her*.

"'And my good friend the Calender,' don't you remember, in Johnny Gilpin? Nothing to do with Calendar, an almanack, of course."

"Oh, ah, yes! I understand. Of course not, one with a K, and one with a C. Most interesting."

Everyone agreed that it was most interesting, but nobody seemed to think it intrusive when Priscilla, the elderly housemaid, advanced from the dining-room window almost into our midst and announced that tea was ready.

"Shall we ask a few more, first?" asked Miss Alicia, who was thirsting to tackle old Harry Dray. She longed to hurl *Clerestory* into her puritanical lap, and see what she would do with it.

"The tea might get cold," suggested Miss Broom.

"And so might we," thought her sister.

The "Teas" evidently carried it. And in we all trooped.

The dining-room looked very attractive to those whom unwonted intellectual exercise had provided with an appetite. The big table was loaded with good things, and the plate was very handsome and well-polished. The elder ladies all sat down squarely; indeed, Miss Darrell explained that she could never enjoy her tea standing up, "it got in one's veil so."

"This table-cloth," observed Mrs. Windsor to the elder Miss Dray, "was spun at home in the family, I

lay a penny, and wove by the websters as used to come round. All the linen at Oaklands was."—(Though she and her daughters had lived for many years at Stone Lodge in Gracechurch, the wealthy yeoman's widow liked to talk of the family acres and the substantial farmhouse in the midst of them). "There's tribble sets of everything. And as for feather-beds, all our servants have 'em; there's no need for any to lie cold in families as has bred geese for generations."

"You must be well provided," replied the old lady, whose causticity did not lessen with her years.

Whoever spun the table-cloth it was covered with good things, and Mrs. Leland, her sister and her daughters had alert and hospitable eyes; every cake was cut, none was there for show, and every lady's plate was kept well provided. About one cake there seemed some pleasing mystery. It was larger than the rest, and held the place of honour in the middle of the table on a handsome silver salver. It had a frill of silvered paper round its neck, and was iced, and it was adorned on the top with ornaments that looked very much as if they had done previous duty as wedding-favours. It was kept to the last and only cut when it appeared that our appetites were flagging.

"Oh, but you must have a slice of *this*," urged Mrs. Leland to every lady who was beginning a polite refusal. "This is the Lucky Cake, the Cake of Fortune. You must have a slice and see your luck: you must, indeed."

We were duly excited.

"Dear me! The Lucky Cake!" said Mrs. Darrell.

"I'm afraid I've tried so many good things—well, a tiny slice then . . . it's uncommonly good—so the luck it brings must be good too . . ."

"Oh!" cried Miss Marjory Gingham, with a start and a gulp, almost as though she were about to choke "Oh! I nearly swallowed something!"

We had all been swallowing a good deal, but understood that she alluded to something special, and munched more cautiously.

Mrs. Leland and her family smiled, and looked arch.

"Well, what is it?" our hostess inquired benignantly. And we watched Miss Gingham breathlessly. She was evidently trying to swallow something and not to swallow something else; her labours were rewarded by the ultimate survival of a crooked sixpence.

"Ah, ha!" declared Mrs. Leland, when the coin appeared in public. "That means Ten Thousand a year."

Our congratulations were still flowing in when the second Miss Windsor made a grinding noise with her teeth that sounded quite uncomfortable.

"What on earth have *I* got?" her expression said as plain as print. She soon knew, and a wedding-ring proved to be *her* share of the luck.

"You'll be married within the year, my dear," our hostess assured her, with as much elation as if the bridegroom had been as visible as the ring.

"I hope it's not brass," whispered Mrs. Darrell to Harry Dray, and looking as if she rather regretted having eaten her slice. "It's like one out of a cracker."

"Is there anything else?" inquired another Miss Windsor.

"There's the thimble," replied Mrs. Leland.

"And that means an Old Maid," explained Miss Alicia.

"I believe it is brass," said old Harry Dray. "I shall not finish mine. It can't be wholesome." Miss Broom, the eldest Miss Shrimpton, and several of the more prudent unmarried ladies evidently shared her suspicion, and would eat no more. The Misses Gibbs ate on to show that they had minds superior to belief in luck, and the younger ladies did the same to show that a thimble had no terrors for *them*. But they need not have had any scruple: our hostess had too much tact. Miss Leland broke in on a rather thoughtful silence to announce:

"I have it!"

"Oh dear, Maretta, the thimble?" inquired her mother. "Well, well!"

"It's clearly my fate," said the good-natured spinster. "I always get it."

And I suspect she always did. What's the good of offending people when you ask them to tea?

## CHAPTER XV

### PRIMPLEY

OUR end of the town and Pimpley were never, as the Gracechurch phrase would have put it, very *great*. Everyone knew everyone else, at all events to *move to*; not that we were apt to pass each other with a bow when we met in the street, for we were seldom in a hurry and most of us liked conversation; but, though Pimpley and Church Street exchanged calls, mutually inquired after each other's health and relations, and compared notes as to servants, Pimpley end was chiefly intimate with Pimpley, and Church Street with Church Street end, including St. John's Hill and the Mount.

On the left-hand side of the road as you entered Gracechurch from the railway-station, which was not in the town (the advent of the railway at all was still a grievance when we arrived) there were four genteel residences, and on the other side were the lodge-gate and miniature park of one. That one was called White Place and was originally built as a dower-house for a widowed Mrs. White of Whitehouse. In our time there were no more Whites, for Whitehouse had been sold to Mr. Galt, and White Place had been sold too. Both had been bought by strangers who had



made money in the new railways, whereby, in the opinion of Gracechurch, such lamentable harm had been done to England. In White Place lived Mr. Chess, and his niece, Miss Parthia Chess (if she had been Gracechurch-born there would, of course, have been four of her), and if you protest against the impossibility of her Christian name, I can only say that it wasn't my fault. In church we sat immediately behind the White Place pew, and I could always see St. Simon and St. Jude reflected in the bald part of Mr. Chess's head from the nearest window in the south aisle. He was a tall, straight, very clean-looking old gentleman, always dressed in the same shiny black broadcloth, and immaculate white shirt and tie, and his neat features never expressed anything except prosperity. One could not imagine his ever being very glad of anything or very sorry for anything—or anybody. Miss Parthia, though a niece, was not youthful, but her costume leant that way, especially in summer, when she came to church in flowery silks and a lace shawl: her bonnets were both feathery and flowery, and indeed fruity too, and bore no particular reference to her dress, but they were, so to speak, always in season: thus they displayed primroses, and violets, in spring; lilac, syringa and hawthorn about May; and geraniums and verbenas in summer. I remember on her head some red and white currants so lifelike that it spoke volumes for the honesty of our Gracechurch birds that they did not attempt to eat them.

Not very long after our coming to Gracechurch

Mr. Chess died, which did not seem to make much difference to anybody, except that Miss Parthia ceased to be a niece, and burst out into full bloom as an aunt, with troops of nephews and nieces of her own : they were said to come generically from Liverpool, but they none of them matched or were each other's brothers and sisters. In a more censorious place they might, perhaps, have been described as a little vulgar, but in Gracechurch it was not usual to speak as though genteel inhabitants could have vulgar relations. We took each other for granted ; and it is not a bad plan.

Though no one at our end of the town had ever known Miss Chess well, it was a great shock even to Church Street when she died. For she was found dead in her bath one Christmas Eve, when her house was crammed with nieces and nephews ; which proves that Christmas Day fell that year on a Sunday.

White Place was taken furnished by Captain Nore (a retired Naval commander), and of him we shall have more to say.

The high wall enclosing the fifteen-acre park of White Place ate up all that side of Primpley : but, opposite, as we have said, were four houses in which "gentry resided"—nearer the town were a dozen less eligible dwellings in which inferior people merely lived : an exciseman ; a brewer, who had retired from the manufacture of beer to consume it ; a draper, also retired, whose leisure was sustained by the same means ; Mr. Fench, the ironmonger, who had filled the dwelling-rooms over his corner-shop with ploughs and other implements (the ploughs had to enter by

the parlour bow-window, as if they had been pianos) ; and others whom I do not remember. In one of those houses lodged Mr. Burgoyne, who taught me Latin, and became my relation-in-law.

As to the four genteel residences, it was to the corner one, nearest the station, that Mr. Llewelyn Tudor withdrew from the Mount when his mother died and left him an orphan of sixty. He there read the newspaper and cultivated bulbs, when not out walking with a top-hat on the back of his head, a malacca cane under his arm, and a wheezy spaniel labouring along behind him, till Pompey thought he had gone far enough, when the sagacious animal would sit down and await his master's return.

Next door lived Mrs. Hudson, a widow, of course, relict of an American gentleman whom Gracechurch vaguely believed to have been a planter, but had never seen. He had left her a competence, and she entertained Pimpley at supper-parties with a good many hot dishes, and whist before and after. I often saw her in the town, and sometimes at church—she suffered from a chronic asthma that our Saturday fogs often rendered acute. In winter we were subject to fogs, and it was remarked how frequently they would come on of a Saturday night. "I'm one of those," Mrs. Hudson would observe to her neighbour, Dr. Blackfold, "that can make a Sabbath of their own armchair and fireside."

"That's true religion," the doctor would agree, "and churches are windy places—I sometimes fancy it comes from the pulpit."

Mrs. Hudson was short and plump, with a round face, and a good many flaxen curls ; she dressed prosperously, though her clothes never seemed to be new, and looked rather like Mrs. Thorn with all the character left out.

Dr. and Mrs. Blackfold lived next door, and the doctor was scientific and cynical. He did not practise, and was very comfortable on his wife's money, and his own pension : he had been a ship's surgeon and Mrs. Blackfold alluded to his naval days, but I doubt if they had been royal naval days. Dr. Hart declared he had poisoned a first-mate (inadvertently, of course), and had been given a bonus to retire, by the Company.

He was an odd-looking person, with a high colour, and abundant white locks, that curled about his ears under his rakishly tilted top-hat ; he had a roving eye (two, in fact), and a mischievous sharp chin. His trousers were not nautical, being very tight, but he always wore a pea-jacket, too short for him ; and, as he skipped jauntily along the street, he switched the air with a gold-headed ebony stick.

Mrs. Blackfold thought him irresistible, and was delightedly jealous of his ogling eye that wandered where it listed. She thought herself scientific by marriage, and had learned to know what she was supposed to see down his microscope, though she confessed to me once that she could never shut one eye without the other, and when both were open could see only the pattern of the table-cloth. His conversation was apt to be a trifle "free," like his thought, and his wife attributed both to his profundity in science, and was proud of both accordingly, but would say :

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"Fie, doctor, fie! You'll teach Master Ayscough your s'eptical views : and a glass of sherry and some macaroons would be better for him."

"Master Johnnie is fortified against infection by his belief in Apostolic Succession," the doctor retorted with a grin. (I was about ten at the date of this remark and had not the least idea what he meant by Apostolic Succession, but already I was notoriously High Church—for Gracechurch. Perhaps Mrs. Blackfold knew as little what he meant as I did.)

"If his mamma wishes him to believe in Apostolic Succession," she observed good-naturedly, "he's fully right to believe in it."

Macaroons and sherry apart, she was very kind to me ; and so, in his way, was he. He talked with a kind of scoff in his manner, and gave the impression of considering this planet slightly ridiculous, which disconcerted me, as I could not disguise from myself the fact that I lived on it : but he took a good deal of interest in the other planets, and had a fine telescope through which he cultivated his intimacy with them ; and he would invite my mother and myself to look through it at Saturn's rings and Jupiter's moons : after which we had shrimp-sandwiches and negus. Mrs. Blackfold thought out-door astronomy at night dangerous to the health without negus. On other occasions we were invited to spend the evening looking down his best microscope (for he had two), and the doctor would show us all the insides of a flea, which he explained with such minute knowledge that, remembering Dr. Hart's anecdote, I could not help wondering whether,

if that first-mate had been a flea, he might have been alive still. Once Dr. Blackfold lent me his second-best microscope to take home, with permission to retain it for a week. When the day to return it arrived I took it back with horrible misgivings : a visitor had sat upon one of the slides and broken it in two : and to confess this mishap was truly frightful.

"Well, you're punctual to a day," said the doctor. "I said a week, and that was Thursday, and it's Thursday again."

Nothing could be clearer : but then I had broken a slide.

"Do you find the room warm, my dear ?" inquired Mrs. Blackfold, "you seem flushed. I'd give you a glass of water, but it might chill you. We'll make it a pear—our jargonels are as juicy as a bunch o' grapes."

"No : it's not the room . . . Dr. Blackfold, I do beg your pardon : only that won't mend it—I know how kind you were lending me the microscope, and I'd rather have broken anything of my own ; I know you must feel angry——"

"Have you broke the microscope, my dear ?" asked Mrs. Blackfold mildly.

"No, not the microscope : but a slide, one of the slides showing part of a spider's elbow—I *wish* I could tell you how sorry I am, Dr. Blackfold."

"Pooh ! It would cost, perhaps, fourpence, if you bought it. But I didn't. I made it : and spiders aren't rare. One spider would make fifty slides. . . ."

He laughed, and rolled his head, and really it was very good of him to make a joke of my mishap.

reproached myself for sometimes thinking his bantering tone unpleasant. But I always liked his wife best of the two, though she was not so clever. She took me there and then into the garden to get the pear, and told me of her baby, dead long before I was born : it had only lived six months, but had been like an angel. "I often envy your mamma her three boys," she said with a little pucker of the lips as if she was trying not to cry, "indeed, I envy the poor people theirs—they often have so many, and I never had but one. She was as like her papa as this pear is like that."

I asked Mrs. Thorn afterwards if she had ever seen Mrs. Blackfold's baby.

"Yes, oh yes, I saw her. A wizzly little image—a deal more like the doctor than an angel. A gripey-looking little thing, with *his* chin, and sharp eyes. It's more like an angel now, I reckon, but not so like the doctor."

In the next house to Dr. and Mrs. Blackfold lived a Mrs. Flint and her son, Roddy Flint, who was a captain in the Yeomanry, and liked to be given his military title. Mrs. Flint was a very old lady and was said to be related to a baronet, but nobody saw much of her, as she was nearly bedridden, and so deaf that it was a trouble to her to listen when strangers tried to make her hear. Roddy's good point was his kindness to her, but it was his only one, and when she died all his goodness was gone—at least, so far as this world's scrutiny goes. Let us hope that somewhere else it may be remembered in his favour that he was

an affectionate and attentive son to a rather querulous, sour old woman who thought him perfect. He was rather handsome in a raffish, unpleasant fashion : dressed loudly and talked loudly, was selfish, dissipated (even in Gracechurch one could be dissipated if one was determined to be so) and good-for-nothing. He affected a military air, and swaggered in what he took to be the military style : his sandy hair and whiskers were dyed grate-colour—no other black is quite the same, or I would seek a more poetic simile : and his voice had a winey roll in it. Nobody could have taken more thought for his raiment, and no raiment could have expressed him more fatally than that which he affected. His jackets would have made anyone look a snob, and his hats would have made an Archbishop look disreputable. But, alas, poor Elsie Fallow thought him fine, and Captain Flint was as willing as man could be to be fallen in love with : to fall in love himself was as far out of his power as it was for him to feel like a gentleman. He had flirted since he was sixteen, and at six-and-thirty he could do nothing better.

The Fallows also lived in Primpley, but at the wrong end—in the row of houses where no genteel families resided. Mr. Fallow had been a farmer and had “failed,” a very rare thing among our Rentshire farmers, who were mostly well-to-do, prosperous people, with a good bit of private capital, men who hunted and could afford it, drove their wives and daughters in to church on Sunday mornings in comfortable wagonettes, and sent their sons to good



schools at Rentminster or Gracechester. But Lester Fallow, with scarcely any capital, had taken a farm too big for him to stock properly, had married early, for love, and had many children, all daughters, several of whom died after living long enough to cost him a good deal in doctor's bills. He was often ill himself, and nothing seemed to prosper with him ; then came the cattle-plague year, and he lost nearly all his stock, which he had no money to replace without borrowing. Six months after his bankruptcy he died, and, dying, told his wife that, but for her sake, he would be glad of the rest.

The house where the widow and her four daughters lived was the smallest and least desirable in Pimpley, it had no garden at the back, and only a tiny plot in front : but, small as it was, there was hardly enough furniture to fill it, for they had been sold up when the failure came. It was a dull gloomy-looking cottage, always shaded by a big bay-tree that flourished derisively in the next garden.

When the dead man's funeral had been paid for, his widow had not two pounds in the world, and she had no income whatever. But she and her girls worked incessantly, and all our ladies were glad to help them by giving them sewing and embroidery to do, which they did beautifully. Mrs. Thorn told me they had always been respected, poor as they were : for they never got in debt a penny, and lived to themselves, never mixing with the shop-folk, who were far better off, or making any attempt to scrape acquaintance with the class above them. She believed that they scarcely

ever ate meat, even on Sundays, and lived mostly on bread and potatoes.

"I've sent them a fowl now and then," she said, "and a spare-rib, when we killed a pig, or a sassage ; but not as often as I'd have liked, for Mrs. Fallow had a high way with her, and when folks has nought left but their bit o' proper pride, it's hard to hurt it."

In the late Rector's time there had been what was called a Saturday-class, and Mr. Knight had specially invited Elsie Fallow to attend it, though it was chiefly attended by the young ladies belonging to the genteel families. Mrs. Thorn told me that her own girl, Lettice, had often spoken of Elsie's beauty and lady-like, modest ways : but, although all the Gracechurch young ladies saw her every week, and had a sort of acquaintance with her, it never, with any of them, got beyond an out-door acquaintance as you might call it.

"I did call on the mother," Mrs. Thorn explained, "but I saw she didn't like it. I suppose she didn't care for folks to see how little there was in the room—no carpet, and just a chair or two and a table to work on. What can you do ? You can't offer to give a lady a carpet, nor yet a armchair, tho' I'm sure we've carpets rolled up as she'd ha' been welcome to, and nobody ever sits in the armchairs in our north-room and isn't likely to. She was civil—but civil and strange, and I wished myself gone. ' You'll come and see me, Mrs. Fallow, won't you ? ' says I, as I got up to come away. ' My girl thinks a lot of your daughter, and, if you'd bring her, Lettice would be very glad.' ' Well, no, Mrs. Thorn,' says she, and I couldn't help liking

her for speaking so straight, tho' I was cross too, 'we've no time for visiting; neither Elsie nor me. Every hour's visiting would be an hour taken from work, and work is all we have to look to. I'm a widow . . .' 'And so am I,' I put in, but she put me down. 'Yes,' she said, with a sort of hard smile, and brushing away what I'd to say with her hand (and a lady's hand it was). 'Yes; but I'm a very poor one, as I have no need to tell you. Work has kept us out of debt, and a home over our heads: but if we neglect the work there's nothing to make up for it.' I tried to put in another word—for the girl's sake: for Elsie wasn't a widow, and it seemed hard that a young girl should be made to feel like one. I thought at our house with my sweet girl she'd feel younger and brighter like. But her mother would not have it. She set me down as I couldn't have put up with it if she'd been a rich woman. 'You're very kind, Mrs. Thorn,' she says in her far-off way. 'I know you mean kindly. But Elsie must learn to live as we *must* live. And, Mrs. Thorn, if you won't be offended, let me thank you for the presents you've so kindly sent. But it's best to eat what you can earn, and if we can't earn dainties we should not eat them.' I knew she was forbidding me to send her the sorts of bits of things—a duck or a loin o' pork or that; dainties, indeed!—as I'd sent at an odd time. So I had to get away as I could, and do as she bid me; tho' it's hard too, to sit down to a good table and think o' neighbours, better born, maybe, than yourself, with nought, of a Sunday even, but potatoes and salt."

"I think she was very proud," said I, not altogether admiring Mrs. Fallow.

"Nay, Johnnie. When poor gentry has nought but pride in the cupboard it's natural they should keep it. It can't be a bad thing as keeps them honest and respectable, and no one could ever say in Gracechurch as Mrs. Fallow owed him a shilling. I doubt the Lord, as took all the rest away, won't grudge her that. And how could I push on her? Her father, they say, was a curate wi' a dozen children, but a gentleman, and it's like enough she was remembering all the time what *my* father was."

When we came to Gracechurch, Elsie Fallow was only eighteen, and in that same year her mother died and Captain Flint proposed to marry the orphan girl. Why he did so nobody could quite understand, though everybody said she was too good for him. Old Mrs. Flint was also dead, and Roddy was supposed to have over two hundred, perhaps nearly three, a year. Worthless as he was himself, it could not seem a bad match for a penniless girl, and it was generally hoped she would make a respectable man of him. Everybody called upon her now, for the name of Flint was a good one, and it was not forgotten that the captain's mother had titled relations. For a time it seemed as if Elsie really was succeeding in making her husband give over drinking at all events, but he was as fond of billiards as ever, and soon he resumed his attachment to brandy also. The billiards and brandy were connected with a taste for betting, and it is not as true as it is proverbial that the devil looks after his own—at

least the truth lies apart from the ordinary meaning of the phrase. The devil may have kept an eye on Captain Flint, but he did not send him luck, and he lost pretty heavily.

In the early summer of the second year after their marriage the usual Yeomanry training came on, and the captain informed his wife that he had to go to Rentminster to take part in it. He went, but he did not come back : and in due time it appeared that Captain Roddy had left England altogether. There was one child already, and another was born a month or two after the father's disappearance. With two babies Elsie found herself penniless and much worse than a widow—at twenty years of age. Her sisters Maggie and Kate were twins and only a year younger than herself. One of them had found a place as nursery governess in a farmer's family, the other the Miss Gibbs had taken into their school, where she taught embroidery and all sorts of fancy work, and looked after the mending of the pupils' clothes. The Miss Gibbs loudly declared that she more than earned her keep and small salary. The youngest of Mrs. Flint's sisters was nearly eighteen, and, being tall and very sedate, looked, perhaps, a little older : for her also the kind Miss Gibbs found a situation in another school, somewhere in Wales, kept by cousins of their own.

So Mrs. Flint had not her sisters on her hands, but, with her two babies and no income, it was hard enough for her as it was. She took one cheap room and set about earning a living, as before her marriage, by needlework and millinery. One night, after dark,

Mrs. Pay, who was by far the more fashionable (and expensive) of our two Gracechurch dressmakers and milliners, called upon her : her heart was as warm as her complexion, and she had been turning over in her mind how to be of use to the poor deserted young lady.

"Mrs. Flint, ma'am," she said rather breathlessly, when the door was shut, for the stairs were steep, and she was not thin. "I must ask you to excuse the liberty I'm taking : but I came late on purpose so as no one should see me come. I know that you are thinking to add to your income by a little pretty millinery and that——"

"I have no income," said Mrs. Flint, but she spoke in plain simplicity without any of the defiant hardness her mother would have used. "And it's not only pretty work I'm ready to do, but any sort . . . I hope you don't think it wrong of me, as if I was trying to injure your custom ?"

"Not the least in life, ma'am. If you was to set up a shop next door to mine you'd have as good a right as I had. But, of course, there's no idea of any such thing. You only wish to pass the time with a little work at home. Well, Mrs. Flint, ma'am ; if you'll overlook my boldness in coming, what I'd like to say is this. You couldn't be asking for orders ; it isn't likely : and there's more profit in the pretty millinery than in the heavy dressmaking, and the work easier— if you've a taste for it. And, ma'am, you've a lovely taste : you could make a more ladylike bonnet, more distangy, out o' ten shillings' worth o' material than I

could out of a pound's worth—and that's the truth, though it's between ourselves. I could put a deal of custom in your way—but if I was to say to ladies, 'You go to Mrs. Flint,' you mightn't like it, and the ladies might be offended too, thinking as I didn't care whether I had their custom myself or lost it: and I couldn't afford that. But if you'd let me take their orders and give you the work to do, for me, it would be between ourselves, no one need be a penny the wiser; and I could put a good bit of work in your way without you having to look about for it. I could afford to give you as much as you'd ask the ladies—for I know what ladies are, they never look to pay shop price for what don't come out of a shop; and you'd be under no obligations to me, for I should put on my own profit, never you fear, ma'am. I know as you'd turn out a thirty-shillin' bonnet with ten or twelve shillings' worth o' stuff, and I'll be bound you never charge the ladies half what you ought?"

Here the good woman paused, for she was slightly inquisitive as to what the ladies did pay.

"I should not think of asking more than seven-and-six for making a bonnet out of somebody's own material," Mrs. Flint answered readily.

Mrs. Pay threw up one hand, in a well-cleaned glove, and laughed.

"There! See how you'd spoil the market on me! The lady 'ud get her bonnet for seventeen or eighteen shillings; and none of 'em 'ud *look* at any o' mine priced under thirty. And I don't believe as one of 'em 'ud wear for *best* a bonnet as cost under: ladies

is like that. That girl o' mine put the wrong prices on two, not a month gone ; thirty shillings on one as the material was worth a guinea, and forty-five-and-six on one as I'd made up out of bits I had. Mrs. Gwynn wouldn't look at the best, when she saw the ticket—though by far the prettiest. 'I niver wore a bonnet under two sovereigns in my life,' said she, and bought the dearest. But I've bits by me now, silk, flowers, feathers, ribbons and that, as *you'd* work up into half a dozen lovely bonnets, I'll lay a crown ; and if you're willin' to do it, I'll bring them round myself to-morrow night. I'll give forty-five shillings for the six and be sure of getting my money back on the first I sell—or I don't know how to sell, and I ought. (There's ladies as I should not think of lettin' out o' my showroom *under* a bonnet) ; and pr'aps you'd be just as clever with a mantle—but, if you say 'Yes,' I've the money in my pocket now, and ready money's an understood thing in a case like this. Trade and credit's own sisters. But it's not for ladies like you, credit isn't ; you'd never know how to make it pay its way."

Thus it came about that Mrs. Flint got a good deal of work, and Mrs. Pay had the satisfaction of dispensing with a certain assistant whom she considered needlessly attractive in an establishment whose mistress had a husband rather susceptible to female beauty.

About six months before Captain Flint's disappearance Captain Nore came to Gracechurch and took the house at the corner of Primpley, to which later on Mr. Llewelyn Tudor retired on his mother's death.



Old Mrs. Tudor was still alive when the naval captain arrived, and he was some relation of hers, of a very high family, Gracechurch understood, and extremely well-off. His father's brother was a Viscount, and his grandfather was a famous Admiral who had been made a peer after the Battle of Trafalgar. Captain Nore's mother had been, it was said, a very wealthy lady, and the Captain was her only child. He was not much above thirty when he came to Gracechurch, and was still a handsome man : but his good looks were not at all of the same sort as Captain Flint's. He was "all over a gentleman," as Miss Broom observed, and there was a very pleasant air of honesty and manly simplicity about him. He dressed neatly, but evidently without much thought as to his clothes ; and it could hardly be counted a fault that he was a bachelor—there were so many families with four young ladies in them, that he need not remain one.

Alas ! he showed no disposition to fall in love, and some people said he would look for a title, which no Gracechurch lady was in a position to provide. The truth was he was not looking for anything : but, without looking for her, he often saw Mrs. Flint, and nobody was more full of indignant pity for her when her wretched husband ran away. But he was a young man and a bachelor, and could be of no service to her. And, unfortunately for her, she was not a widow. Captain Flint left her alone and penniless, but he presently informed her that he was alive and well. The ship which took him to the Cape was wrecked, and the news in due time reached Grace-

church, and we heard that many of the passengers and crew were drowned.

Mrs. Thorn scoffed at the idea of his being among the number. "Unless halters grow ready-made in the sea," she declared, "he's alive ; you'll see else."

And she was right. In process of time Captain Flint wrote from the Cape to assure his wife that she might dry her tears. "Some botherin' raft or other had saved him," as Mrs. Thorn told me : though he had fulfilled her prophecy, she did not forgive him for being alive.

He wrote about once a year, for two or three years, but never gave any address to which any reply could be sent. At last, ten years after his treacherous flight, an English newspaper, in a paragraph copied from a Cape Town paper, announced his death. He had been murdered by a Kaffir somewhere up country.

"And that Hottentot," said Mrs. Thorn, "cheated the hangman. But I daresay that silly wife of his will cry her eyes out, though he used to beat her, and kicked her too . . ."

For a few months Mrs. Flint wore mourning, but it dwindled down to gray and lilac before the year was out : and at the end of the year she married Captain Nore.

I believe Mrs. Pay was the first to hear the news : she came round one drizzly November evening, with an order for a fine bonnet, and, as usual, made a great favour of it to herself, pretending to be "full of mourning," and quite overworked.

"But it's not a mourning bonnet. It's for a cus-

tomers as likes a good bit of colour, and a rich article, and don't mind paying for it. I could well afford twelve and six for the makin'."

"Well, I will make it," said Mrs. Flint, "but I'm afraid it will be the last." And she laughed with a little happy blush that roused all her kind friend's delighted suspicions at once. The young widow, for though thirteen years married, she was barely one-and-thirty, got up and knelt down by the fire, and began raking out the ashes quite extravagantly, Mrs. Pay watching her with eager curiosity.

"You're not going away? Not leaving Gracechurch, I hope?" she asked.

"No . . . But . . . You'd never think of such a thing—but, I'm going to be married."

"Not think of it! It's just what you ought to do: and what anyone'd think of as had eyes in their heads," Mrs. Pay protested, quite indignantly.

Simple and plain as Mrs. Flint's cheap lilac dress and black ribbons were, they suited her, as everything she wore did: and the kind woman watching her with admiring eyes, said flatly she deserved a good husband better than any lady in Gracechurch or round it.

"And he *is* good," said Mrs. Flint, in a low voice that trembled a little, "too good for me."

"Whoever he may be, that he isn't," the comfortable dressmaker declared, "not if it was the Marquess."

"The Marquess is married already," said Mrs. Flint, with another happy laugh. "But I don't believe any Marquess is so good as Captain Nore."

"Captain Nore!" cried Mrs. Pay; the truth went

far beyond her hopes, and she spoke almost with awe. "There's not a finer gentleman in Rentshire, nor yet a better man (if it was the Bishop)—Captain Nore ! He's as good—as good as a lady ! And, you'll live at White Place, and ride in your carriage and pair . . . Mrs. Flint, ma'am, my dear, there's one thing as nothing'll prevent me doin', and that's makin' your wedding-dress and bonnet myself, and if you was to talk o' payin' me for 'em I'd know you wanted to offend me."

She had left her chair, and was kneeling on the shabby hearthrug by the young widow she had been helping for many years with delicate secrecy, and the two women held each other by the hand. The dress-maker was twenty years older than her friend, and her face was rather red, and on her upper lip was a slight moustache that would have pleased a boy of eighteen better than it pleased her : she had a temper, and could rate her husband and her assistants roundly enough, not mincing her words : but under her tight bodice (full of pins), there was a good womanly heart, and the sweet and lovely lady at her side was not ashamed to be hugged to it.

"Oh, my dear ; oh, my beautiful dear lady, how glad I am !" cried the stout milliner. Her eyes had always a certain moistness, but they fairly overflowed now. "I know it's a liberty, but I do feel so proud and pleased . . ."

"How kind you are ! How kind you've always been ! What would Cissy and Lucy and I have done all these years without the work you've put in my way ? "

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"My dear, you must try and forget all that now. It's not fit as Mrs. Nore should remember . . . and not a soul alive knows, except us two, not even Pay ; only the ladies'll think as my taste's all gone, so they will ; and that's the truth. Many's the fib I've told these ten years when ladies has admired *your* taste and complimented *me*. But they were white ones, and many a worse is told in the way of trade."

Well, Mrs. Flint became Mrs. Nore, and lived at White Place in a prosperity that no one envied her, for all knew she deserved it, and all bore witness to the simplicity with which she carried herself in her late-found affluence. It was easy to see that her affluence made the least part in her serene and thankful happiness : she was as justly proud of her husband as he was of her, and everyone praised his fatherly tenderness to her two little girls, who fortunately had not the slightest resemblance to their own wretched father, but were just like what Elsie Fallow had been some twenty years before.

During the long years of her practical, and then her real, widowhood Mrs. Flint had borne the highest character, and nothing but good had ever been spoken of her.

"Ay," said Mrs. Thorn, "she's got a husband as deserves her, and she'd deserve him if he was twice as good as he is. The luck's as much on his side as hers. She's worth ten of her mother, tho' I always thought well o' Mrs. Fallow, high and stand-off as she was. Poverty made *her* prouder, and neither poverty nor riches could spoil that sweet girl. How

glad my Lettice'd be to see her riding in her big carriage—but the poor's alive and they'll get the good of it."

For nearly another ten years the sun of Mrs. Nore's prosperity shone serenely upon her and her good husband and the two girls. There was not a happier home in Gracechurch, though no other children came to Mrs. Nore. The Captain did not seem to mind, and was content to treat Cissy and Lucy as his own: at eighteen Cissy married, and a year later Lucy was married too, and both had found good husbands, not exactly wealthy, but young men of what Miss Broom called "ostensible position," quite able to support their wives in comfort.

"Now we'll have to be Darby and Joan and sit on each side of the fire keeping each other company to the end of the chapter," said the Captain. And Mrs. Nore did not look as if the prospect alarmed her.

Alas! the end of the chapter was to be very different.

One day in autumn Mrs. Nore had to go over to Rentminster, and, as her husband had a heavy cold, she insisted on going alone. She went by train, and was soon busy shopping, making haste, so as to catch an early train home.

She was choosing some furs that the Captain had said she must have before the winter, and her well-filled purse was in her hand. The shopman was displaying an expensive set of sables, and behind him was a big looking-glass.

"Perhaps, ma'am," he observed deferentially, "sables may seem a little *elderly* . . . but there's no fur more becoming . . ."

He looked up, and over Mrs. Nore's head ; for a very seedy-looking gentleman had come in, and was hovering near the door, not at all the sort of customer likely to want costly furs : not at all the sort of customer the man was used to see in his establishment, the oldest and most respectable in Rentminster : for the man by the door was flash-looking, but worse than shabby, by no means young, though the reverse of venerable.

" Well, sir, what is it ? " asked the shopman sharply : and Mrs. Nore lifted her eyes from the sables on the counter, and, without turning, looked into the big mirror that leant forward at a slight angle. In it she saw Captain Flint.

In an instant the poor woman, with her knees shaking under her, had risen, and her purse dropped from her hand. As she turned her piteous lovely face, for it was lovely, at forty, still, Roddy shuffled and picked up the purse with greedy fingers that were not very clean.

What she said, or whether she said anything, she never knew, nor I think did the shopman, nor even Roddy Flint. She got outside, somehow, and stumbled across the road to a church, the door of which was open : it was the Catholic church, and was, she knew, always open.

It was quite empty, except for an old Irishwoman with a basket by her side, who was kneeling before an altar far away in a dim corner. There was a faint stale smell of incense, and the sun was shining down through the red robe of a saint in one of the

windows. Elsie, for she had no name now besides, went in, and Roddy followed, still holding her purse longingly.

"Give it me," she said ; and he gave it her, with great reluctance. He guessed it was full of notes and gold, and he could not bear to part with it.

"It is not mine," she said, in a plain, dreadful voice ; "if it was mine you should have it all." She knew that it was all he had ever cared for.

"Not yours ! Whose is it ?" he asked, staring blankly.

"*His.*"

"Your husband's ?" and he said it quite simply, as if not doubting she held the man she had married in such innocent ignorance to be in truth her husband.

"I have no husband."

Nothing could have been more terrible than the plain flatness of the words and of her tone. If this fellow had come back to reclaim her he would have known at once that it was no use. He had come on no such errand. He dreamt of no such thing. All he wanted was money, and he had no desire to rob the rich man of his wife.

In low, whining tones he said as much.

"You hadn't heard of me for seven years. You thought I was dead—you are legally his wife," he tried to tell her, with eager, tremulous haste, eyeing the purse all the time, "but it was another fellow called Flint that was murdered : I knew him : he said he was a cousin : but it got about that it was me, and it suited me to let them have it so, for I was in a bit of trouble. I did not come back to upset you :



I knew you had married well : I wouldn't write—so as not to get you in any trouble—lest your husband should see the letter, or the post-office people recognise the writing. But I was starving : and I worked my passage home—yes, worked it, *I*. I'm starving now . . . .”

“I haven't a penny. I've no money. I've nothing of my own. Nothing. The clothes I stand up in are not mine.”

She could hardly stand up, but she did not sit down : just inside the door they stood quite near together, Roddy unable to keep his greedy eyes away from the purse in her trembling hand. But she held it tightly, knowing him capable of snatching it from her.

She knew he was a liar, but he had told the truth in one thing at all events : she could see that he was starving.

Hurriedly dropping the purse into her pocket, she began fumbling at her wrist. She wore no other jewellery, but on it was a handsome bracelet that Cissy's husband had given her ; the gold was plain but massive, and there was a large sapphire between two good diamonds. It was the only thing on her that had not been bought with Captain Nore's money, and now she remembered that it was her own.

“Here,” she said, almost stammering, “this is mine. I forgot it. Take it and get food.”

Captain Roddy had a quick eye for pawn-shops, and he had noted one at the other end of the town : he took the bracelet at once and seemed inclined to obey her sign that he should go away with it there and then.

"What shall you do?" he asked, as he turned to the door.

"Pray if I can," she answered wearily.

Her face was so ghastly that he was not sorry to go away from the sight of it. The door opened, and then closed behind him. She knelt down, leaning against the back of the nearest bench; but she could not pray, so she thought, but sorrow is as true a prayer as love, and I am sure Someone was listening.

Rising from her knees she went up the side-aisle at the end of which was the little dim chapel where the old woman was still praying. Over the altar was an empty cross, in front of which sat the figure of the Mother of the Man of Sorrows with that of her dead Son laid across her knees. The old Irishwoman turned at the sound of the step close behind her, and Elsie bent down.

"I cannot pray," she said; "will you pray for me? I wish I could give you something, but I am penniless . . ."

Everything about her looked costly, but the old woman took no heed of it, only of the cruel sadness of the lovely face, and of the lips that quivered so piteously.

"I'll ask *her*," she said. "His Blessed Mother will pray for you. She knows what it is."

The beggar-woman had had a son once, and he was gone—all she had ever had: she came here for comfort, but of her own sorrow she said nothing. She just touched Elsie's rich dress with her old palsied hand, and lifted it a little towards the statue of the King's

Mother, as if to commend this other sorrow to her : then she went back to her praying, and Elsie went away. Ten of the fifteen miles to Gracechurch she walked, and would have walked them all but that a kind young farmer gave her a long lift in his gig, never troubling her with talk as she sat at his side.

It was nearly eight o'clock when she reached the gate of White Place. There was a small lodge just inside it, and she asked the woman to go to the house and see the Captain.

"Beg him to come here," she said, "and do you not come back till he returns."

Amazed and troubled, the woman did as her mistress bade her ; and in five minutes Captain Nore had come to the lodge.

The moment he saw her he knew something dreadful had happened. It seemed to her now that the blow had fallen on *herself* long ago, and she looked like one who had been suffering for many days. Not that she was aged, for she looked almost childish in her helpless misery. Now she had to see the blow fall on *him*.

"I sent for you here," she said, "because I could not go to your house. I have no right there. I never had."

She could barely speak or stand, and she was deadly tired, and horribly sick. The words she used were not chosen or thought out ; they simply stammered themselves out of her as they could.

He saw how she trembled and feared she would fall.

"Do not come nearer," she cried, "you must not touch me."

Then she laid on the little table, where the lodge-woman's supper things were set, the purse Roddy had so greedily desired, and her watch, and the return half-ticket that she would not use.

"They are not mine. I'm not mad. They are yours and never were mine. I have been spending your money, and wearing your clothes, and eating your food. . . ."

"Am not I yours and all that I have !"

"No, no ; no, no :" and she shook her head, and then bowed it miserably. "No. I thought I was yours and you mine. I had nothing to give you, only myself, and that I gave and it was not mine. . . ."

It must seem as though she thought only of herself : but she was thinking more of him. She knew how good he was, a very pure, God-fearing man, to whom it would be a fearful thought that he had taken another man's wife. If it had been some pain she had to bear alone she could easily have told it : but the pain and the innocent shame he must bear too, and she knew not how to tell him.

He knew at last. And he could comfort neither her nor himself. He knew her so well that he knew she would not even be helped by him : with all his wealth he could not lighten even the load of her utter penury : he respected her so deeply that he durst not argue against her fixed resolve to touch no penny of his money.

"I shall go," she told him at length, "to Mrs. Thorn. She is a good woman and I can accept alms from her. She will let me stay with her a few days,

and will lend me clothes. Do not be angry if I send these back to you. Then I will go and be a nurse. I could do that. I could not bear to live with Cissy or Lucy."

And this plan she carried out. She never saw Captain Nore again nor he her. She left England and learned nursing in France in a hospital served by Catholic nuns, and it was always said in Gracechurch that she became a nun herself, but whether that were so or not I do not know.

Captain Nore left Gracechurch at once and he died within a few years : a month or two later Roddy Flint did what Mrs. Thorn declared was the first good thing he ever did, and that too late, for he died too.

When we left Gracechurch the wife he had abandoned was still alive.

## CHAPTER XVI

### MEETINGS

I OUGHT to remember, but do not, whether the famous Mission took place during a long absence of our Rector or after his return. His wife (like himself always very kind to me and mine) was delicate, and the doctors ordered her abroad for a whole autumn, winter, and spring. Her husband and children went too, and meanwhile the *Locum Tremens*, as Mrs. Thorn at first called him, was a Rev. X. Williams. This gentleman had more history behind him than Gracechurch suspected; and now that I know it I am not sure whether that history would have commended him to Gracechurch Protestantism, or the reverse.

At his University he had been well known, having held there a benefice in which he had had for predecessor a very illustrious divine who had joined the Catholic Church. That example Mr. Williams followed: but he did not remain a Catholic, and resumed, as we have seen, the functions of an Anglican clergyman. How long he was a Catholic I do not know: when I knew *him* I did not know he had ever been one. Nor, as I have said, can I decide whether Gracechurch would have admired him for the double change, or condemned him for having ever changed at all.

I suppose that before he left the Church of England he had been, as they called it, a Puseyite : at Gracechurch he seemed rather to be "Broad." But there are, or were, High Broads and Low Broads, and he was, I fancy, High Broad. He *looked* quite low, but wasn't, though "staunch" people, like old Harry Dray, were deluded by his tie and waistcoat, and gave him an approval they hardly yielded to our own Rector. Everybody, I think, *liked* the Rector : but he was not reckoned popular in the sense in which his predecessor had been. Mr. Knight had been as "High," and perhaps higher, but height in a bachelor clergyman was more readily condoned in circles largely composed of ladies whom years could not age, than in a married man.

Mr. Williams became speedily popular, and as he only stayed nine or ten months, he carried his popularity away with him : he was a comet always approaching perihelion.

People who imagine they love sermons particularly delight in new ones—that is, in new preachers : and the Rector had been preaching in Gracechurch for nearly twenty years, having been Mr. Knight's curate.

Mr. Williams was as fresh as a muffin, and nearly as buttery. Harry Dray declared he had almost as much unction as a Dissenter, though how she knew I cannot tell, as she never went to any of our five chapels. He wisely eschewed dogma, having burned his fingers by previous meddling with it, and enlivened the pulpit by a sort of social essay quite new in Gracechurch. Our Rector preached from a written sermon, and Mr.

Williams did not ; perhaps out of a modest consciousness that if he saw his remarks in manuscript he might be tempted not to oblige the public with them.

Other *extempore* preachers (we called it Extemporary at Gracechurch) have probably been assailed by the same suspicion.

I remember a thesis of his on Courtesy, in the course of which he condescended on a very homely illustration.

"Even the little dogs," said he, "wag their tails when they meet and smell at one another." There was quite a rustle in the church. The truth of the illustration was so incontrovertible that the proposition involved was carried, so to speak, *nem. con.*

"The Rector would never have thought of that," Harry Dray boasted afterwards.

"Nor said it, if he had," sniffed her sister vigorously.

"Well, I call it Evangelical," persisted Miss Harry.

"You seem to think Evangelicalism and vulgarity the same thing," retorted Miss Dray, quite savagely. "I daresay you're right. You know more about them than I do."

"But," objected Miss Broom, "Mr. Williams can't be vulgar. The Williamses of Plas Twddwy are one of the best families in the Vale of Cefn : and his mother too—a Baronet's only daughter. If she had been a man Mr. Williams would have been a Baronet himself."

"If his mother had been a man he'd be a cleverer man than I take him for if he existed at all," cried Miss Dray, closing the argument.



There was a good deal of difference of opinion in Gracechurch as to the Little Dog illustration. Those who least admired the Rector admired it the most : some thought it "Well, a little—yes, rather : you know." Still, I think there were rather more people in church for the next sermon : something else of a debateable character might supervene. But the next sermon was on Almsgiving and not so striking.

Mrs. Williams rather puzzled Gracechurch : she went to every service from Monday morning to Sunday night, and "stayed in" at every Communion service, but never once "received" during the whole time she was with us. Cousin Jem, in earlier days, had stayed in without receiving, and her subsequent proceedings had thrown a lurid light on the practice. Long afterwards I heard that Mrs. Williams was still a Catholic while at Gracechurch : but, if so, she was rather a queer one.

All this is a very long parenthesis : I only meant to allude to the Mission, and the outbreak of district visiting it produced.

The Miss Lelands of the Mount had each a district, and they took it all very seriously. It was, they urged, essential that there should be frequent meetings of the District Visitors, to compare notes, and report progress. And this our other ladies found they did not care about.

"Compare notes !" cried one Miss Shrimpton. "I can't compare what I haven't got, and I can't be bothered taking notes. What's the good, taking notes, when you know all about the people all your life ?

I'm sure I don't want to know how many children the women in your district have apiece : and I never try to remember how many my women have. It's for ever changing : last week Mrs. Tonks had five, and now she has seven.

"Two in a week !" gasped Miss Broom.

"Twins, of course."

"I think," said Miss Leland patiently, "notes are useful. We can thus see what young people require confirmation."

"I don't see that at all," persisted Miss Shrimpton, whose visiting was not conducted on a theological basis. "The Bishop came last winter, it'll be two years and a half before he comes again ; then all those that are old enough will come up."

"Perhaps not," urged Miss Leland darkly.

"Well, if not I can't help it. I just go round and chat a bit, and maybe give 'em half a pound of tea, or that ; and a track if they'll have it——"

"That's pauperising them," the younger Miss Leland observed severely.

"Pauperising ! Pauperising means making folks poor : it ain't me that makes a woman with seven children poor : and it don't make her a penny the poorer getting a pound of tea for nothing."

"I thought it *was* to give 'em things we went round," murmured Miss Broom helplessly. "What's the good, else, of finding that they *are* in need ? I shouldn't like to poke into a poor body's cottage (and she busy, perhaps) and go away without doing something to make her glad I'd been."

"Nor I," said two Miss Gwynns in a breath.

"I couldn't do it," agreed their mother. "I really couldn't. When poor folks sees the gentry comin' in on 'em like that, they *look* to get something comfortable by it. *I* should."

"So should I," said Mrs. Thorn whom Miss Leland had cajoled into attending the Meeting. "What's a track to full your children's insides with, when you've half a dozen of them?"

"I don't think much of tracts," said Miss Leland.

"And *I* don't see what Confirmation has to do with it," Miss Harry Dray interrupted sharply. "In our class of life we *are* confirmed. I was, at my finishing school——"

"So was I," several ladies put in.

"Exactly. It's a thing of course among *us*: not perhaps for boys: many boys never do get confirmed——"

"Dick never was," Mrs. Gwynn admitted aside.

"Well, and is he a bad son? Nelson may not have been confirmed for aught I know——"

[Mrs. Gwynn stared; why *should* Miss Harry know? Nelson was our shoemaker.]

"——but he won the Battle of Trafalgar."

Harry Dray, though objecting to the Meeting, was rather enjoying herself. Her opportunities for public speaking were few: and it was not unpleasant to broach such doctrines in the drawing-room of the High Church Mount.

Old Mrs. Leland was wiping her spectacles ruefully. Her sister, Miss Swinkin (not specially High Church

but loyal to Maretta) knitted her brows and a muffetee. Miss Toft made troubled gurglings : and the younger Miss Leland, with pursed lip, wound up her watch intemperately.

But Harry Dray was not yet at the end of her tether.

"Confirmation !" she ejaculated. "What's Confirmation to do with the poor people (half of them Dissenters), I wonder ?"

"One object—the main object, perhaps—of our visiting is to rally the poor to the Church," said Miss Maretta Leland, slightly flushing.

"Is it," snorted Miss Harry, now slightly red in the face.

"Really, I never knew that," murmured Miss Broom.

"Nor I," said Mrs. Gwynn. "I couldn't think of interfering. I should think all that was for the clergyman."

A twitter of approval greeted her.

"For the clergyman if he was fool enough to meddle, either," said Miss Harry. "People in our class of life belong to the Church naturally——"

Mrs. Gwynn (whose parents had been Wesleyans) nodded vigorous agreement.

"—but it comes as naturally," Miss Harry went on, "to some poor people to be Dissenters, as it comes to them to *be* poor. They understand it better."

"I think it do," murmured Mrs. Gwynn.

("Does," murmured one of her daughters in a lower tone.)

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"The question is," Miss Leland suggested, in a rather high sustained voice suggestive of restraint, "not what is natural for ignorant people, but of our duty to them. The question is, is the Church of England meant for the people of England or not?"

"And the answer is," Harry Dray announced, with less restraint in her tone, "it is meant for the people that like it. We do—we were brought up to it—just as we were brought up to dress and behave properly."

"Only we don't always behave properly," the younger Miss Leland interjected with fiery coldness.

Miss Harry Dray arose and shook herself—she always seemed to wear more petticoats than other ladies—and then gathered herself together, like a whole army, for a withdrawal that implied anything but defeat. Mrs. Leland trembled, and Miss Leland shot a glance of half-grateful, half-deprecating warning at her sister. Miss Toft gurgled quite alarmingly. Miss Swinkin feigned to be counting stitches. Miss Broom unbuttoned a glove timorously and tried to button it up again and couldn't. Mrs. Gwynn wondered that a lady of so full a habit as Miss Harry Dray should let herself get so red in the face: but Miss Harry was not "out" for prudence and was not in the least afraid of apoplexy.

"I am sorry to leave so instructive a meeting," she said. "If I could remain longer, I might learn a great deal. Theology and Manners. But I have an appointment at half-past five. It is now five——"

"Tea is ready!" announced Mrs. Leland's maid appearing—warm from making toast—at the door.

"Do stay!" pleaded Mrs. Leland.

"None for me, I thank you. A stalled ox would not tempt me."

This puzzled Mrs. Gwynn : in all her life she had never heard of a stalled ox for tea, or of any lady being tempted by one.

But the tea was an excellent one ; and after her departure, Miss Harry had fewer supporters round the hospitable board than she might have counted on. Mrs. Gwynn had not the faintest idea what had upset her. Miss Shrimpton, who had wanted to have her own say out, was not grateful to so exclusive and talkative an ally and Mrs. Thorn took Maretta aside and patted her (literally) on her narrow back.

"Confirmation and that's not in my line much, my dear. But she's an aggravatin' old dragoon, and none so fond of giving as you'd think to hear her. Tracks are more in her line. And, by what I hear, the poor folk get a deal more solid comforts out of you and your sister—though you don't talk of it. *I* know where that shiftless Mrs. Driggle got her blankets from. And I liked you all the better for helping one as never did know how to help herself—God helps them that do, and leaves the others to us, I reckon. Only I wouldn't bother about the Methodies, my dear. She wasn't so far out there—the poor folks do like it, and that's the truth (My mother was one, and there never was a better woman). The church is a gentry's religion—and I've heard Mr. Thorn say the poor folk never did care much about it. He used to say they stuck to the Catholic long after the gentry, and pretty nigh as soon as that was gone they took to the chapels."

This doctrine was not tamely admitted by Miss Leland, but she could hardly argue it all out there and then, in a sort of smothered aside at the tea-table. The duties of hospitality largely fell to her share, and hospitality and argument go badly together.

Thus ended the first Meeting, to which most of the ladies had more or less objected. Some parishes rejoice in meetings, but Gracechurch did not. No other meeting of the District Visitors was held, and thereafter every lady did her visiting, as indeed she had done it before, in her own way.

My mother's district was far out in the country and comprised the Duke's Woods, with a thin and scattered population of gamekeepers, woodmen, and farm-hands, and a big hamlet called Dudlow, lying in a valley between Duke George's Wood, and one known as the New Planting—that had really been new in the days of the Regency. Dudlow was a village in everything but the possession of a church, or school. It had a flourishing public-house, the Bear and Stump; a smithy; a small shop, not so flourishing as the ale-house because it chiefly took credit and the beer was chiefly paid for in cash; and a dismal-looking little chapel which had once been a sawyer's shed—the disused saw-pit outside being railed in to prevent youthful worshippers from tumbling into it.

The people at Dudlow were more "beggish," as Mrs. Thorn called it, than those who inhabited the scattered cottages in the woods, though I do not know that they were any poorer, and much more alert to insinuate spiritual yearnings after coals, flannel

petticoats, tea and blankets. The wood-folk, unused to visitors, were glad to see a strange face and hear a fresh voice, and did not seem to be wondering if you would give them anything. .

One old man, of nearly ninety, lived all day in a hut just inside the New Planting. He had been paralysed, as to his legs, for more than twenty years, but he could work with his hands, and made faggots. He sat by the wide door of his cabin where he could see the carts go by on the road, or into the wood ; and, summer and winter, there he worked from breakfast-time to dark. A great-grandchild brought him thither in a donkey-chair in the morning and fetched him away at dark. He had his dinner with him, in a basin with a saucer on the top : his "tea" consisted of the remnants of his dinner. I suppose his real tea, with hot tea out of a pot, was when he got home. He always seemed to be dressed alike, for over his other clothes he wore a smock, beautifully worked and pleated at the breast and shoulders. His son-in-law and grandsons, like himself, all worked on the estate, and they were not poor, as things were reckoned then. Certainly the old man must have earned as much as he cost anybody, for he made an enormous number of faggots and was paid by the piece. Except for rheumatics he was never ill, and he never complained even of them.

"Nay, I've never nought the matter wi' *me*," he would say. "Some folk enjoys turble bad health : but I've lived out-a-door all my days, and I reckon it keeps me sweet. I don't ketch cold : times it rains



for weeks, times it snows a lot : but I'm friends wi' all the sorts o' weather, and don't quarrel wi' 'em, nor they wi' me. The rheumatics ain't much : one wick they'll peck at one bone, and nixt wick they'll gie a snap at another : but niver all o'er you at onst, and they'm all in the bones. I reckon they don't know how to bite at the flesh."

He never laughed while he delivered himself of this jocose diagnosis—if it was meant to be jocose. He never did laugh. And I very seldom saw him smile : but he was a cheerful, contented old fellow : not usually talkative, and not inclined to reminiscence. My own experience of very aged persons is not that they are commonly given to talking of far-away times. I always wished he would talk of them : but my little hints seldom led to much.

"Yes, I remember when Waterloo was," he admitted. "I was a widower two year then. And now I'm a widower——"

"Fifty-seven years," I suggested, after a hurried subtraction of 1815 from 1870."

"No, sir. *She* died same year as the Queen's husband, that's how I remembers it so plain. My first widow died two years afore the battle, and I buried my second same year as Prince Albert."

"It made a great stir—Waterloo?" I suggested, eager for memories from one who was a grown man when the great news came.

"I heerd it mentioned. Reuben Price, as kep the Bear and Stump, he told me. 'Simon,' says he, 'what-iver do ye think? Farmer Fallow's big bull's drownd

issen i' the black pond against the blasted oak (the thunder killed it, in the big July storm, when I was a nipper) : and I daresay he wishes now as he'd fenced it in. It's bottomless the black pond is ; and there's bin a battle and all the French killed. And Bony's to be brought o'er in chains for the old King to see.' That's when I heerd about it."

"But wasn't there a lot of rejoicing and merry-making ?"

"They rang the bells at Gracechurch, I reckon. But it's better than four miles, and we can't hear 'em : and Diddington church bells they dursn't ring, the steeple's so queer. No, I don't mind as there was any to-do in Dudlow : none of Dudlow was i' the battle."

"And Trafalgar ? You can remember that too ?"

"Yes. 'Twas that year the big oak was blasted. And two ricks fired same night——"

"The night of Trafalgar ?"

"No, the night o' the storm when the big oak was struck. 'Twas late i' the year when Trafalgar battle was—and my father was hurted by a gig running o'er him i' the dark—not far from the Bear and Stump : and mother and me had a power o' trouble wi'n. But I heerd that battle mentioned too : they made out 'twas a victory, but Nelson was killed—I niver understood the rights of it. It's not the sort o' victory I'd care to pay sixpence for when you're killed yoursen."

Rather daunted by this pessimistic attitude, I suggested a little reading aloud.

"Yes, sir, I'd liever hear a bit o' readin' than mind o' they old battles. It's more comfort to a man as has

no use o' his legs. The Lord can't expect country bodies to moither theirsens wi' battles : and I'm too old for 'em. If the French was to come o'er now, I could do naught to stop 'em. I couldn't go out agin *them*, and if they'd come to me I couldna dale wi' 'em, unless they'd come one at a time and kneel down to be faggoted."

So the twelve-year-old boy betook himself to reading aloud the Message of the great Prince of Peace, and the ninety-year-old woodman chopped quietly, and listened carefully. His little robin, that he called his Friend for Crumbs, sat still upon the old man's bench and seemed to listen too ; like Simon, he had bad legs (he had been caught in a trap) and Simon had mended them. He was younger than Simon, but an old bird too. His eyes were still bright, and he could still hop about, but he never flew far away, and his home was the shed full of faggots.

"Ay ! he listens," the old man agreed. "The Same made he as made we, and I reckon he knows. He and me has had our werries and has o'erlived 'em : and same Friend helped us."

I told Simon the legend that accounts for the red upon the robin's breast.

"Is it i' the Bible ?"

"No. It's only a pretty story."

"Ay, it's pretty. If it was true, the bird 'ud ha' more rights to be proud nor us. We drove all the thorns in, and the bird tried to pull one out."

Outside the yellow autumn light was throwing level arms in among the bare trees ; far off a dog was bark-

ing in a farmyard ; here there was no sound except the chop of Simon's billet, the brittle crash of the faggot-twigs in his hands ; and even on the turfed ride we could hear a footstep. From where I sat I could not see who was coming : Simon saw, and said :

"Good evening, Mrs. O'Malone."

It was the Irishwoman to whom Mrs. Thorn had sent, by my mother, the good dress that had been her daughter's. She came to the door and looked in.

The book was open on my lap, and she seemed inclined to go away, not wishing to interrupt, and perhaps not willing to listen to heretical reading. But I shut the book, and indeed it was getting late, and time for me to start on my four-mile walk home. We knew each other already, and exchanged greetings.

She was old, but very upright : with a face whose fine features were weather-worn, and had a rather sad expression. Her eyes were dark and bright like the robin's.

"I've brought a few apples," she said, with scarcely a trace of Irish accent. Indeed it was many years since she had left her home. "You can keep 'em by you here, and eat one when you like it."

The old man nodded, and took the little gift with a word of thanks. Thinking these neighbours might enjoy their talk better without me, I said good evening and left them. But I had not gone far along the road when something made me look back, and I saw Mrs. O'Malone following. So I loitered, and let her overtake me. She was evidently going home, for her cottage was not far ahead. Old as she was, her step

was quick and firm, and we were soon walking along together. Still we did not say much. I liked her, and felt a peculiar interest in her because she was a Catholic, but all the same she made me shy, from a feeling I had that she regarded me with a sort of antagonistic criticism. Some people do not mind that at all; but it has always shrivelled me up. I had sometimes seen her with my mother, and noted that towards her the old woman's manner was quite different. Nobody could help liking my mother, and Mrs. O'Malone evidently did not try.

"Why did you stop reading when I came?" she asked rather abruptly.

"I didn't. I think I had read all I meant to read. But I *should* have stopped even if I had been going to read more."

"I saw that. Why?"

"Because you would not have liked it. Simon Rundle does."

"I could have gone away."

For a minute or so she said no more, then she turned on me, quite sharply.

"The folks here say you're half a Catholic. But there are no half-Catholics. You're a Protestant like the rest of them."

I think I had understood all along that this was the ground of her antagonism to me—or what I imagined to be such.

"Mrs. O'Malone," I said, "I never push my religion at you."

"You do not," she admitted. "But I can see it

there: and it angers me. I like the out-and-out Protestants best. An imitation Catholic gets my rag out."

"I can see that," I said, laughing a little. "I think you might let my religion alone. I let yours alone."

"You do. And you'd better. There's no fear of your mother—she's Irish herself."

"An Irish Protestant!"

"She is. But not a black one."

"Am I black!"

"No, you're not. But I can see, whenever you've come to the cottage, that all the time you are thinking of my being a Catholic."

"That's true."

"And you'd like to be talking of it."

"That's true, too, perhaps. But not to argue—Mrs. O'Malone, I believe all that you believe, at least I think so. There'd be nothing to argue about."

"That's it. I can't see what you've to do believing it, being a Protestant."

"You can call me a Protestant, and I can't stop you. But it won't make me one."

"And it won't make a hen an angel calling herself one."

We both laughed then, and, in spite of her scolding, I felt less shy of my outspoken critic than I had ever felt before. We had come to her cottage, and she asked if I would come in—probably to grind me down further. It was really time for me to be going home, but I went in. All my short life there had been something irresistible to me in the word "Catholic":

and, whatever the sharp-tongued old Irishwoman thought of me, I knew she was one.

It was a very poor cottage, but not dirty nor untidy, though with less attempt at the appearance of comfort than most of the cottages I knew. What specially distinguished it, however, from them were the few simple evidences of the faith of its occupant. The walls were very bare ; but on one there hung a shabby crucifix, with a bit of faded and withered "palm" thrust in behind the arms of it. Underneath, on a rickety table, stood a little statue of Our Lady with the Divine Child in her arms. A well-worn set of rosary-beads hung about its neck. On another wall there was a picture of St. Patrick in an intensely green vestment with a serpent heading for a precipice beneath which a patch of lake was visible. And near the picture hung a holy-water stoup. I should have liked to dip a finger in it, but my hostess was watching with alert scrutiny, and I durst not.

"I daresay," she observed sarcastically, "you've holy water of your own at home—of your own blessing, maybe."

"No, I have not."

"They say you bless yourself."

"There's no law against it."

"There's laws enough against us. The Queen on her throne could not be a Catholic, though she could be a Jew or a Turk, and none to stop her."

"I never heard she wanted to be a Catholic," I said, laughing again.

"Bad luck to her then for a Queen."

Being a loyal person I changed the subject rather hastily, and asked some question about the blest palm.

"I do get it at Rentminster. I go at Easter to make my soul, and the priest saves me a bit."

"It's eighteen miles from here—how do you go?" I asked, already guessing the answer, and a lump in my throat.

"In the carriage-and-pair God gave me: on my two legs," she answered shortly.

I knew she must start soon after midnight—fasting: and the lump was too much for me. I could only turn away and pretend to be looking at St. Patrick Sharp as her tongue was it was in an Irish body, and an Irish heart lay deeper in it than her tongue: she understood and softened instantly.

"Eh! that's the trouble!" she cried. "Nineteen miles! And who'd there be to let the priest know if I was dying!"

"I would if I knew. I'd see a priest came."

"*You!* Ay, a Protestant 'priest'—the back of my hand to him."

"Don't curse people, and think evil. Your own priest I'd bring. I've some money of my own, and I'd send a trap for him."

She was not at all penitent for her conditional malediction: but she was softened again, and made no cross rejoinder.

"I know a priest at Rentminster," I said hurriedly, "at least I've spoken to one." And, with a fiery blush I told this fierce old critic, what I had told no one, how I had tried to go to Confession to him.



"And you did that !"

"I did."

"And like your imperence ! A Prodestant broth of a boy to set about decaving the holy father : but it's not the likes of ye would ever decave him. He sorted ye, and it's well for ye he was up to ye, and *did* sort ye. The curse of God would have been on ye, if he'd not bin too many for ye."

He had *not* sorted me : but that was his business and mine. Mrs. O'Malone, in her vehement zeal, had lapsed into a more uncompromising Irish accent than I had ever heard from her. Another aspect of my iniquity struck her, and she darted off on it.

"And all that decate to go to Confession !" she cried with uplifted hands of astonishment at the imbecility of Protestant youth. (Any reader who remembers the former chapter called "Lessons" will know that I had attempted no deceit.) "Wormin' and oilin' to confess your sins, when the glory of the Prodestants is that they can kape their sins to themselves—and rot 'em. A quare Prodestant—and good luck to you."

Then did I again protest that I was no Protestant, and hated Protestantism and all its dismal ways and works. But quite uselessly.

"At all events," I urged not unfairly, "you've no right to pretend I would try and deceive *you*. If I knew you wanted one, I'd bring you your priest from Rentminster if I had to fetch him myself. If I had been born what you are, do you think I'd want to turn Protestant ? Why should I want to turn *you* ?"

Then she abruptly changed her tone, and said :

"A Prodestant you are : but you'll never die one. No Prodestant lad that would spend his saved money to bring a priest to a dying Catholic would die Prodestant—and that's my word to you. You see that holy-water font?"

"Yes."

"Well, and it's holy water in it. But not the holy water you'd be thinking. I do take a bottle with me to Rentminster when I go to make my soul, and bring it full home. But it won't last the year. And when it's gone I fill the font with water from the Priest's Well. You know the Priest's Well? Ay. And do ye know why it's called the Priest's Well?"

"They say a priest was killed there long ago."

"And it's the truth. I axed my own priest about it and he told me. In the bad days when a priest would be hanged for saying Mass, there was one that had been going about a long while in these parts—in this country and over the border in Wales. Mostly he'd be saying Mass and hearing confessions in some house belonging to one of the Catholic gentry : and there the poor folk would go, having secret warning he would say Mass on such a day. And one day, just as he had finished, the Prodestants came down and burst in to take him : but he got off that while, and escaped out into the woods where he lay hiding. It was winter and bitter cold : and little was it he had to eat, and not much to cover him. Some days he'd get a bit o' food, and more days he had nothing. At last they found him, and it was at that well. A Catholic woman had brought him a meal of meat, and she brought her baby,

too, that had never been baptized, and the well was his font. They say he blest it and so the water in it was made holy water. Anyway the child was baptized, and it was then the government people came down on him. I don't rightly know if there was soldiers with them : but they had guns, and there was a bit of a struggle, some of the woodmen trying to help the priest to get away, for the wood was thick, and the priest knew the paths in it better maybe than the soldiers—if it was soldiers. So it happened by chance, or by the purpose, that a gun went off, and the holy father was shot through the heart. The snow was red with his blood and the well too. And the red stain's in it still. And it was God's mercy he was killed there like that : for, if they had taken him off alive, to gaol, they'd have half-hanged him, and cut him down alive, and cut his heart out of him, and he alive, and hacked him alive in four pieces . . . And that's where I get my holy water, when the bottle's empty I do get filled with the Easter-water. Even the Prodestant cratures think a lot of that water, and some say it's good for the heart disease, and more say it's grand for the windy-spasms."

She paused a little, and then went on.

"And now I'll tell you what I never thought it would be you I'd be telling : and, if I do, it's because in my heart I know you'll be some day what you pretend to be now—and that's a Catholic : and the back of my hand to your half-and-half nonsense and botheration."

It was getting dusk now, and she went over to the fire and threw some sticks on it, so that the dim cottage was soon aglow with a pleasant flickering light.

"Well," she said, "when my old man died—and it was only a year last Holy Souls day, I never thought it was for death he was took. His heart bothered him, and it had bothered him off and on a long while. But some of the neighbours said 'twas only the windy-spasms, and they lasted many folks twenty years and longer. He had often been the same way, and got right again soon enough. I thought it would be the same way then. But it wasn't. It was the end of him. The pain was gone, or near : or he said so, to comfort me. He was a terrible unselfish man, my man was, and always thought less of his pains than of my trouble. It had fallen dark, and the cottage was like it is now, with a bit of light from the fire : and he was in his chair here : for he was aisier sittin' up than in his bed.

"'Are you better ?' says I.

"'I am,' says he.

"'If there was a need of it I'd go to Rentminster,' says I, 'and you should have the priest if I had to carry him home on my back.'

"And that made Shamus laugh a little, for he's a tall man, our priest, and big altogether.

"'But, Norah,' says my man, 'I'm thirsty, and I'd like if you'd give me a glass of the water from the Priest's Well.'

"'I will that,' said I, and I put on a shawl to go and fetch some. There was some in a bottle, but I wanted him to have it fresh from the well : and it was only a sup in the bottle.

"'It's troublin' you, it's a long shtep,' says he.

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'But even the Prodestants say the water is good for the heart.'

"'It is that : and no trouble at all,' said I, and I went away to get it. It was a windy night, but not many clouds, and a full moon, and it was easy seeing my way. I could walk quick, and I did, to get soon back again. I prayed as I went along, and begged the Holy Lord to make my man well so as he should not die with no priest to him. And I prayed for a sign to show He would listen to me. And He gave it. When I got where you can see the place where the well is—I saw him——"

"Saw Our Lord ?"

"No. I saw the priest. He was standing by the well, and blessing it. Then a cloud came over the moon, and, when it was gone, there was no one. I went on and filled my jug and blest myself with the water and came straight home, without staring round me. I was not afeard, but only of taking a liberty : and I longed to get back and give Shamus the water, and to tell him to be aisy for he'd never die with no priest to him. I was back in less than an hour : a good bit less—maybe I'd been gone an hour and a half altogether. When I opened the door and came in here I saw Shamus ; he was kneelin' there, against the little table, under the holy Cross . . . 'Shamus,' I said with a tremble on me, 'I've seen the priest at his well, and it's his own promise, and the Holy Lord's, that ye'll never die and no priest with ye.' His head was on his arms, on the table, and he never turned nor lifted it. But

he heard, for he was where there's none deaf. And, if I'd doubted, the dream God sent me that night would have told me better. I thought I should dream of Shamus, the first night I'd not him with me since our wedding-day. But I did not. A dream came, but 'twas the priest I saw in it. 'He kept His word,' he said, and I knew Shamus had had a priest with him.

“‘Twas yourself,’ I said (in my dream) to him. But he smiled a little and said, ‘No; my body is dead. ’Twas the Priest Whose Body was Crucified, and is alive for ever, that went to him. He bids me tell you.’ And now, lad, go and bless yourself with the priest’s holy water, and never mind saying good night: but good night to ye, and may the help of God bring you safe home.”

The hunter’s-moon lighted me home—not the home Norah meant, I think: and the quiet country-places that I had loved all my short life lay around me, resting patiently under its white, clean brilliance. I met few wayfarers—one belated hunter, leading a lamed horse: and now and then a country lad, or two. I could not help wondering whether any of them had such thoughts as the widowed Irishwoman I had left kneeling by her solitary hearth.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A FAREWELL PARTY

DURING the autumn and early winter of 1870 I was at home : at the end of January I went away to school, Addison's school, and Garrick's, and Dr. Johnson's, at Lichfield : and, after about a year and a half, or perhaps two years, there, when the Head Master took a living, I went with him, and was again a private pupil, having two or three companions. All that may be passed over here, having nothing to do with Gracechurch, though much with myself. When I was about fifteen I again came home to stop for some time, not going to another school for nearly two more years.

Those years were as happy as any I had spent at Gracechurch, and the happiness of them was largely due to the Grace family, with whom I almost lived, at Gracechurch House, often staying there for weeks together. If I say little of those kind friends here, it is partly because they are still alive, all except dear Colonel Grace, the largest-hearted man I ever knew : and partly because, full of character and individuality as the whole family was, it was their *own*, and not local, or particularly coloured by Gracechurchian ideas and ways.

I have never known any other people who seemed to have so thoroughly the secret of being useful and amusing at once, or who so heartily combined the business of serving others and entertaining themselves. They were full of good works, and found a large share of their enjoyment in doing them : all their benevolences were treated as part of the day's amusement. I think that was why the poor people liked them so much, and I should have believed that this way of theirs was an inheritance from their mother, were it not for the fact that it was also peculiarly like their father.

Mrs. Grace was long dead at the time of which I now speak, and her death was the first great sorrow I ever knew. After forty-six years the memory is so full of pain that I cannot bear to dwell upon it here.

During those two years that I spent at home, before going to my last school, many things happened important to myself ; but these papers are meant to be as little as possible autobiographical, and so I pass them over also. The *Gracechurch Papers* were never intended to embody the story of a boy's conversion to the Catholic Church : if here and there some episode has slipped in foreshadowing what was, I think, always inevitable, those episodes have been allowed their place here mostly for the sake of the Gracechurch memories that hang about them, and the people of dear Gracechurch days connected with them. Whether those who knew me best suspected whither my steps were carrying me, I cannot rightly guess : they said nothing, that I can remember, to show that they did.



Sometimes my kind friends at Gracechurch House would chaff me a little, always very good-naturedly, about some new development. Once on returning from a long visit somewhere, one of them said, laughingly :

“Johnnie always comes back more High Church than he went away.”

But nothing was ever said to hint that I was supposed to be peering so far beyond the Gracechurch horizon as Rome.

As I said, those last real Gracechurch years were very happy : they were the last in which I felt that I really belonged there ; for after I went to my last school, I was at home only for the holidays, and often only for a part of them. While they lasted, it hardly ever struck me that, in the time so rapidly drawing on, when I should have to go out into the world and earn my bread, the old links would be severed, and Gracechurch would know me no more : that the dear place would presently have to draw about itself the tender, shadowy veils of a memory. I had often been reproached for being too imaginative, but my imagination concerned itself very little with my own future. It ranged backward rather than forward, and occupied itself with other things and other people : with things gone and lost, that I would have loved should be present still, with men and women whose finished life had a more potent spell for me than any life I saw about me. Honestly I must confess that the first attraction of the Catholic Church itself lay for me in the glamour that lay around it as a great, wonderful

thing belonging to the old, noble past, when all the world was gilded with a light since faded from sea and land. I only mention this because I think it has been so with many others : that, at first, they drew near, with reverent step, to do homage to an incomparable relic, appealing to them with all the poignant force of pathos and immemorial, sacred, but monumental beauty : and presently found that the relic was more, that the *Corpo Santo* for which they had brought only wistful sighs and tears was alive : that it spoke still, and with a living voice—no stereotyped, fixed echo, archaic, lovely, but in a dead language—a voice still heard in many lands, still obeyed by folk of many rival aims over all the world, still wording the same Physician's same prescription for sick and sorry men, always teaching the One undying hope, never falling old, because eternal : a voice that cannot be heard without the perception of irresistible invitation. This, I think, is the great difference : that which has been called, in its course, by many names, almost all meant scurvily—Puseyism, High Churchism, Ritualism—has ever implied one hopeless attempt, the wistful endeavour to ignore the English Reformation : to talk and act as though it had never taken place, as though it were an indecorous nightmare, not real but horribly phantasmal ; a thing to shut one's eyes to, and hark back to attitudes and positions long vanished. So that, without the least insincerity, there has always been, in the idea called by all the hard names mentioned, an archaism and an unreality : whereas in the position of the Catholic Church there is always an

obdurate practicalness most unwelcome to such as cling to noble shadows. She admits the English Reformation as a luckless fact, and never tickles herself with the pretty fancy that the English people have been catholic all along without in the least suspecting it : she knows well that the old faith was sent packing, not treasured under a local name and insular disguise : if it is to come back it must be brought back, not merely unfolded from its tissue paper in some unfrequented cupboard. At first this present-dayness of the Church does not attract, but repels rather, those whose effort it is to reconstruct what has never been ruined but only banished. To many, I cannot help believing, conversion to the Church is the awakening from a dream, the summons to walk with opened eyes in the highway of actual life, and a reluctant abandonment of delusions half a life old, fed on lonely, studious, regretful yearnings, back to days gone by for ever. The Sadducees were not alone in thinking God the God not of the living but of the dead.

But, as I was saying, such day-dreams as were mine concerned other figures than my own, and times past rather than days to come : they were not plans or schemes as to what I could make of my own life, and whither it would carry me far from home and Gracechurch. I did not want much to be grown up, as boys, perhaps, mostly do : it seemed to me that it was excellent to be about seventeen. Nor had I any wish to go and seek fortune in some other place : my idea of happiness was to live always where every field and cottage was like a familiar face, to die at last

among the kindly folk I knew. *Dûs aliter visum*, and it is five-and-thirty years since I left Gracechurch never to see it again.

In a former chapter I mentioned that the coming of the Leland family to the Mount seemed to produce quite an outbreak of hospitality : Mrs. Leland and her daughters loved to give parties, and of course the ladies who went to them felt bound to follow suit. I say "ladies" advisedly, for there were no gentlemen, the male element being represented by one boy, and (only occasionally) the married curate.

I remember being invited to stay at the Mount, and it was considered necessary to give a party during my visit—to amuse me. Our day was not eventful. At seven we were called ; at eight we were all in church : at nine we breakfasted. Afterwards the four ladies worked, and I read aloud to them—an improving work that seemed likely to last some time, as we paused a good deal to discuss it. At eleven we went for a walk—except on Wednesdays and Fridays, when we repaired first to church for the litany. The walk was not long, but lasted an hour and a half at least, for the pace was slow, and if the road lay at all uphill Mrs. Leland liked to stop more than once to turn round and admire the view—always the view behind us. Before setting forth we fortified ourselves against undue fatigue or strain on the constitution by a glass of port, and a dry biscuit. But, in offering this, Mrs. Leland would propose a Pick-me-up—to avoid, perhaps, the Bacchic suggestion of wine in the forenoon.

At one we dined, and it was not considered essential

to our refinement to call the meal luncheon. There was no idea of going out in the afternoon—that would be to risk missing callers. So we sat round the drawing-room fire and enlarged each other's minds by our conversation. Mrs. Leland and Miss Toft rather preferred to listen, and armed themselves with fire-screens (painted by Miss Alicia) to do so more intently. A little before three, however, they brisked up, and went to change their caps. Miss Leland and her sister did not wear caps, but they also vanished for ten minutes or so, and came back indefinitely smarter.

Everybody there did some sort of work ; the older ladies knitted, the younger went on with church embroidery, and their visitor again read aloud—it was *David Copperfield*, I remember. If somebody called the reading was interrupted without undue suspense ; that's the best of reading a book where you know what's coming. If no one called, we went on till tea-time, and agreed (like Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*) that there is no enjoyment like reading.

Tea was not brought up to us ; we went down to it, in the dining-room : and it lasted some time, not because we ate so much, but because we had so much to say. At Gracechurch we could all talk for ever, which shows that many things must have happened there not recorded in these papers.

After tea it was just the same : there was merely a change of room ; we went on talking. We did certainly play chess, and backgammon, and sometimes a pool of commerce : but only as a sort of *obbligato*

accompaniment to our conversation. At half-past eight we went down to supper : at half-past nine the maids came up to prayers. At ten we sipped a glass of negus, and "so to bed."

It does not sound exciting : but then excitement was not looked for, or desired, at Gracechurch : it was exciting when the cook rushed up to report the kitchen-chimney on fire—but a false alarm after all : and exciting when the cat swallowed a fish-bone too large for her, and seemed likely to produce it to public view on the new hearth-rug : but Miss Leland, who was all presence of mind, snapped her up in the *Guardian*, and got her safe to the front garden in good time.

There was no other *contretemps* during my visit, and the only great event was the party. The eve or vigil of it filled the house with a warm jellyish smell, and also with a faint odour as of laurel-leaves boiled in milk, indicative of *blancmange* on the morrow.

"Some people now," Mrs. Leland observed, "flavour with essences—bitter almonds and lemons and vanilla : but in my younger days we never thought of them. To give the proper flavour we always used bruised laurel-leaves, or lemon-rind, or a vanilla-bean boiled in the milk—you can use it more than once."

There was not quite so much reading aloud or embroidery that day, and two ladies stayed at home when we went for the morning walk. I do not think that any of the family did any of the actual cooking. "But," said Mrs. Leland, "cook is youngish (she looked about forty when I saw her at prayers) and

of a very anxious temperament. It's only fair to her to have someone standing by she can appeal to in uncertainty." In the course of our walk the old lady explained that there were two special objects for this party.

"It's partly in your honour—for we owe you a little amusement, and it is quite an honour to have a gentleman staying with us. Except when my son-in-law comes we never do have one. Miss Toft, dear : Sister Julia ; shall I tell him our little secret ?"

Miss Toft, in her sepulchral voice, said "Ay. Why not ?" And Miss Swinkin also gave her sanction.

"Well, it was to be a surprise to you :—We shall have *two* gentlemen to-night. My married daughter and her husband are coming."

I expressed all the excitement I felt.

"You'll find him a very interesting man. Very superior."

"Literary too," said Miss Swinkin.

"Quite. He wrote a pamphlet on *Cotton-Waste* and had it printed : it's dedicated to the Mayor of Liverpool—at least he was Mayor the year after : quite a Merchant Prince I understand."

"So the party is in honour of Mr. Cludd too ?" I remarked (not jealously).

"No, not exactly. I did not mean that. The party was settled before we knew he and Selina were coming. But, besides being meant to afford a little variety to you, it's partly for the drawing-room paper."

I had heard of a party in honour of a new carpet, but never of one in honour of a wall-paper that was

not new : and that on the Mount drawing-room had been there in Cousin Jem's time.

"You see," Mrs. Leland went on, "the paper's all over roses—and they were yellow roses : quite a strong yellow——"

"Mustardy," suggested Miss Swinkin.

"Yes, almost mustardy—if that is not too strong an expression. And our chintzes are all over cherries. We always disliked the contrast. It has worried us for four years—but we saw no way out of it. At last Maretta had an inspiration——"

"Few, outside the family," Miss Swinkin asserted, "realise the power and resource there is in that girl."

Maretta's mother gave a little grateful mew, and went on :

"'I'll paint them out,' said she. And we knew she would do it. There were nineteen hundred and forty-seven yellow roses, and eleven hundred and twenty buds, and she has painted them all out with Chinese white first, and painted them in again with crimson, to go with the cherries in the chintz."

Not without shame I confessed that I had never noticed.

"No, my dear. Gentlemen never do notice such things," said Mrs. Leland handsomely. "We watched if you would say anything : but you didn't : and Alicia said of course you wouldn't. 'If the wall-paper was vegetable-marrows on a ground of shrimps a *man* wouldn't notice : and Johnnie'll be a man before we know where we are, mark my words, else.' That's what Alicia said."



Having been blind to the chameleonic behaviour of the roses I felt it unbecoming to protest against the wholly hypothetic vegetable-marrows : and could only, on next beholding it, regard with veneration the paper that had cost the family such vexation, and one of them such labour. It was wonderful how she had brought the roses to so perfect a conformity with the cherries, indeed the buds looked rather like cherries.

Mr. and Mrs. Cludd arrived in time for tea : of course we walked to the station to meet them. It was not our custom at Gracechurch to order out the Gracechurch Arms fly on such occasions : we escorted visitors home on foot, the railway-porter bringing the luggage on a hand-barrow, for which he expected ninepence, and would pretend to fumble for threepence if you gave him a shilling.

Mrs. Cludd was so like both her sisters, who were not specially like each other, that she looked like a compromise between them : a sort of Family Compact, like an alliance between France and Spain long ago.

She was younger than Maretta, and older than Alicia, but plumper than either, and with a more pronounced air of creature-comforts about her—though the course of life at the Mount was not ordinarily ascetic. Her clothes were almost worldly — “ Every stitch on her comes out of Bold Street,” Miss Swinkin boasted auntfully. I fancy she thought more of her children than of stoles : and the churchiness of her maidenhood had condescended to a certain willingness to dine with the best Liverpool families irrespective of ecclesiastical colour.

"I don't like," I heard her say to Maretta, "to hear you speak so sharply of the Unitarians. In Liverpool we dine at five Unitarian houses—and there are none more respected. In Lancashire and Yorkshire there's a good deal of it, and it runs in families that are quite squires. The Pograms of Twitt Hall have been Unitarians always, and the place has been theirs for generations. It's the same with the Blicklicks of Sunny Park—and Mrs. Blicklick's name is on every subscription list, for churches and chapels and all. Their hands are always in their pockets, the Unitarian families' are. If you lived more in the world, Etta, you'd think better of the Unitarians."

"One of Nat's godfathers is a Unitarian," said her husband, incautiously. Mrs. Cludd tried to chill him with one eye while she warmed her sister into larger sectarian sympathies with the other.

"Oh, that's a mere matter of form and compliment—of course Nathaniel has two real godparents of our own church. You mustn't look so solemn, Etta : we're very staunch church-people, and the church we go to is higher than yours here—considerably—and a good deal farther off than our parish church ; that shows : I only wish you *knew* Mrs. Blicklick—I'm sure all the best things on my stall at our bazaar she gave me, though she knew it was for our church-organ."

After supper I had Mr. Cludd to myself for nearly half an hour.

He was, I think, at a loss what to begin talking about.

"I suppose," he said desperately, when he had

helped himself to port, "there's, there's a good deal of er . . . earnestness in this parish?"

He said it in the same tone he might have used had he supposed that small-pox was endemic in Gracechurch—not nervously, having a consciousness of effectual vaccination.

"Mrs. Leland said I was to be sure and say you were to smoke your cigar if you liked."

"I will, then. But I'll finish my drop of port first—it's wonderful what good port these old women get hold of. I daresay I give double what they pay here, for mine, and I don't know that mine's any better."

He turned his chair a bit from the table, and made himself more comfortable: though not of a proud look, he had a high stomach.

"I put my foot in it," he said cheerfully, "letting out about my young shaver's Unitarian godpapa. My wife gave it me for it afterwards. She'd have been just like her sisters if she hadn't married. If old maids had three or four children to occupy their minds, they'd not bother about such things. Selina was saved in time—I had my doubts at first. There were three of them, and all so churchy: a man don't want to sit in a pew when he comes home from his office. However I noticed that it was useful things *she* was always stitching at—not church millinery. And one day I found her alone at it. 'What are you makin'?' I asked her: and she said, 'Things for poor people.' 'Something for an old man,' I guessed, and she laughed at me. 'He would have to be a very small old man, she said, 'it's a child's garment.' I thought that if

she took so much interest sewing duds for poor folks' brats she'd be likely to be more interested makin' 'em for children of her own. So we fixed it up. It's only a pity no one did the same for her sisters—excellent women, both. Only I suppose there's not a man here, except the curate."

"And he has a wife and four children already."

"That's very unfair. Rectors should always engage bachelors for curates—and sack them once they've married. That would keep the ball a-rolling, and give a chance all round: my wife tells me there's to be a muffin-worry to-morrow: that's unfair too. I should have let Selina come alone if I'd known. I like a dinner-party well enough—but that's the only sort for a married man, and dances for bachelors; if I'd meant to attend tea-parties I should have been ordained."

Once set going, you will perceive that Mr. Cludd was not unwilling to talk. He went on for five-and-twenty minutes. Early in the afternoon of the next day he loudly proclaimed that he had a toothache, but his wife would not hear of it.

"*I* don't have toothache on dinner-party nights," she reminded him, "and you're not going to have one on my mother's tea-party night. Be pretty-behaved, and I'll see there's a rubber for you. Aunt Julia and Mamma are as good whist-players as any ladies that dine with us——"

"But I hate dummy," protested Mr. Cludd, who instinctively divined that I was equal to one.

"Yes, but there's Mr. Magnus" (and here she shot a

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supplicatory glance at me), he's first-rate at a rubber ; clergymen always are. Isn't he, Mr. Ayscough ?"

I assured her that Mr. Magnus was no exception to her rule : and Mr. Cludd succumbed. Of course, during this conversation, we had the drawing-room to ourselves.

The party began soon after half-past five. In full dress we sat in the drawing-room awaiting the guests, our usual fluency of conversation failing us, though we were all trying to talk more naturally than ever. The fire was deep red ; the curtains all drawn and draped with especial care to look easy and careless—like ourselves : the wax-candles (there are none now ; blinding, haggard electric light has sent them where the dodo is) were all lighted. The whist-tables were ready ; and Miss Alicia's song ("The Wreck of the Hesperus") stood open on the piano.

There came a ring at the bell, and an interval : we knew a lady—perhaps four—had arrived, and that "wraps" were being discarded in the study, that had been Cousin Duck's smoking-room. Mrs. Darrell and Miss Broom resulted : the elder sister in spruce weeds, the younger in her cinnamon-coloured poplin : both in bracelets and chains with lockets attached—the late Mr. Darrell inside his relict's, the maternal parent of both ladies in Miss Broom's : but Mr. Darrell was secluded behind an onyx lid, and Mrs. Broom peered out from a circlet of remarkably large diamonds, one of which had dropped out, but didn't show owing to the dexterous arrangement of Miss Broom's lace.

Miss Thrush, and Miss Hessy Thrush followed : it is too late to tell all about them here. Their father had been a Perpetual Curate of a lean outlying parish, with about £80 a year : his widow and daughters lived close to the Mount, on St. John's Hill. Miss Thrush was clever and satirical, and came in with the air of having a joke against tea-parties up her sleeve—though it only reached to her elbow. Miss Hessy was ten years younger, very pretty, and rather wilful. Her dress was unduly picturesque : she had real flowers in her black hair, instead of artificial, and a queer sort of veil of very old Limerick lace round the back of her head and round her neck and shoulders, fastened in front with a paste shoe-buckle and a bunch of more real flowers. Miss Swinkin thought this very indecorous, but showed that nothing would make her show it. Hessy laughed a little and pouted a little as she gave her greetings, as though she thought it funny being where she was, and wished she could carry Gracechurch and herself anywhere else and not necessarily to the same place. It is fair to say that all this was her wilful manner ; she lived, and seemed likely to live for ever, a very dull life attending most thoughtfully upon her very old, quite paralysed mother—what a pity I have no time left to tell *her* little romance : it was all to her credit, poor girl. Her sister was only at home while waiting for a new place, having for a dozen years been a governess. She always got very good places, and had been made much of in one family after another, so that on the whole I think she had the

best of it. Hussy would have liked to be a governess too, but then there would have been no one to tend their mother.

Hotfoot on the two sisters arrived one Miss Gibbs, one Miss Windsor, and two Miss Shrimptons. It was Miss Patricia Gibbs—the one who taught me to read and write: Miss Gibbs never went forth into the world, and Miss Florry would not hear of leaving her alone for a whole evening. All four ladies were very smart in their last new evening dresses, not yet three years old, and in ribbons much newer still. They had come to enjoy themselves, and had a pleasant look of it. At Gracechurch we did not go to parties out of a sense of duty, or in atonement for our transgressions.

Another ring at the bell brought Miss Wool, a rather elderly lady (perhaps a little nearer seventy than sixty) who lived all alone, in a house much too large for her, at the top of St. John's Hill. Her voice had a hollow rumble in it as though she were talking in a big empty room, that however was not due to its being habitually so exercised, but to her having no roof to her mouth. As a small child I had been much awed by the report of this circumstance, and supposed that there was nothing between her tongue and the crown of her bonnet. She had a long cold-looking nose, and was not unlike the pictures of Mrs. Pipchin in *Dombey and Son*, but did not resemble that Peruvian widow in character, for she was a meek, generous old woman, who victimised no one, and did many quiet acts of charity. She liked playing cards,

and was not sorry to leave her silent gaunt house for a few hours on such an occasion as this. When we first came to Gracechurch her sister, Mrs. Mole, was alive : and that lady had been rather fond of good clothes, leaving at her death such a store of expensive black behind her that Miss Wool had been wearing it out ever since : so that she looked almost like a widow ; even her caps would have been widow's-caps had she not trimmed them with little black bunches of ribbon and jetty flowers, and made *fichus* of the strings. Miss Harry Dray came last of the ladies, and I think Mrs. Leland had almost given her up : her invitation had been couched in terms of peculiar cordiality—to obliterate the memory of the hostile termination of the famous Meeting. Of course crinolines were long abandoned in 1875, but Miss Harry Dray had still a crinoliney appearance ; she looked as if she had on four or five voluminous dresses one over the other, as Dutch gentlemen long ago were reputed to wear half a dozen pairs of trousers. She piqued herself on her “presence” and not unreasonably. Whatever might have been the colour and texture of the invisible, and supposititious, gowns, that which showed was of velveteen, and a quite imperial purple.

Her greetings of the Leland family were fraught with amenity and forgiveness : a wreath of olive would have been almost more appropriate than the velvet pansies adorning her, still black, hair. But she glowred at Hussy Thrush and her “playactress” real flowers and indecorous “veil-thing.” However it



disposed her to be more confidential with Miss Swinkin, and the reconciliation with the Mount in general was sealed by her perfect agreement with that lady as to the impropriety of "that Thrush girl's bazaar appearance."

The last comer of all was Mr. Magnus, whom we could not help hearing talking to the maid, as he removed his goloshes on the stairs, before he actually appeared in the drawing-room.

It was not without elation that Mrs. Leland directed Mrs. Darrell's attention to the fact that "we had actually three gentlemen."

Tea and coffee were now brought up, on silver trays, with much less to eat than on less ceremonious occasions. Mr. Cludd took a cup, and disposed of it at one reckless gulp, as though taking poison and wishing to get it over.

"Ain't used to cat-lap between meals," he told me in an aside that was not quite a whisper, setting down the empty cup on the top of the *Christian Year* to the visible discomfiture of Miss Alicia, who thought this profane.

Mr. Magnus took several cups of tea, and two pieces of bread-and-butter flattened together with each, as though it were better than nothing. He had been out all afternoon, was hungry, and wished it were supper-time.

After tea we talked, till Mr. Cludd caught his wife's eye so ominously, that she hurriedly whispered "cards" to her mother, who was trying to make Miss Wool understand that it was the wall-paper, not

the chintz that Maretta had "painted out and in." There were two whist-tables, and the rest of us played Loo, except Mrs. Darrell, who excused herself on the ground that her late husband had known, as a young man, a Baronet who had had to sell his property in consequence of his fondness for Pharoah. "And it seemed to make it so much worse," she said, "the name of the game coming out of the Bible. And I resolved never to play for money—not, of course, that Loo comes out of the Bible, or that I see any harm in it. I hope you'll all win, I'm sure: and I shall sit here and admire these very pretty engravings of Italy: I shall take particular interest in them, for dear Mr. Darrell was much in France before we married. He wanted to take me there one year—to stay with a Marquis—and he assured me the frogs are quite a different kind from ours, much larger: but I could not see that proved much, for a goose is far larger than a duck and much more indigestible. My sister will play with much pleasure: she and my dear husband often played Ecarté: and I will buy her lives for her—or her fishes. Is it lives or fishes in Loo?"

By supper-time no one was ruined or obliged to dispose of their estates, and we went downstairs hungry and quite elated. Miss Broom had won two and ninepence, and her sister congratulated her warmly. Harry Dray had won nearly five shillings, and was glad she had forgiven the Lelands and come to their party.

"It's very small," she told her sister on reaching

home, "letting on you even remember merely personal offences. And, in her blinded way, Maretta Leland is a well-meaning woman. But I wouldn't be her *partner* at whist. She *gave* us the odd trick twice."

The views of Italy had given Mrs. Darrell an excellent appetite.

"This boned turkey is delicious," she assured her hostess, "stuffed with oysters, is it? Ah! how they make me think of dear Mr. Darrell! He loved an oyster—in his younger days. Latterly, it was little he could take except gruel, at this time of an evening. I can never hear of gruel without remembering that I am a widow. For months after he was taken I used to have nothing else myself—to go to bed on: though my sister thought it too much for me—his own little basin every night, you know. When the maid broke it, I had it riveted, though Mason charged four shillings and sixpence, and it only cost eighteenpence new. But at last the doctor put his foot on it and declared it was too lowering for my sensitive temperament—negus and a chicken-sandwich he insisted on. Well, one more slice, then, a very thin one—for the sake of the association."

Even without associations to excuse us, we all made a very good supper—even Mr. Cludd, though he felt that a hot meal would have been less effeminate.

"It's like," he confided to me, across Miss Wool's back, "a ball-supper without the ball, and more room to eat it in. So far so good. And earlier. If one has to pasture on cold stuff, it's a blessing not to have to sit up till midnight for it."

He slightly raised his eyebrows when he noticed the

champagne-glasses, and almost pursed his lip, as much as to say, "These old women go it pretty strong." And presently, after a loud pop that made Mrs. Darrell jump a little, a bottle swathed in a white napkin was carried round.

"You must take a glass of our champagne," said Mrs. Leland to Mrs. Darrell, "you must indeed. It's our own recipe and our own making : the recipe was my grandmother's : and we were delighted to find such a number of gooseberry-bushes in the garden here."

Mr. Cludd's face fell. The maid was carefully filling Mrs. Darrell's glass, and very pretty the sparkling bubbles looked, but Mr. Cludd eyed them almost with horror. I was determined he should make no further confidence to me behind Miss Wool's back, and sat resolutely forward.

Mrs. Darrell sipped with placid gusto.

"We always drank champagne," she said, "at Christmas and on our three birthdays. But ours came from France : I don't think dear Mr. Darrell was aware it could be made in England. I think this is nicer : it has more taste, and doesn't prick one's nose so : the French champagne makes the bridge of your nose feel queer. I think this is more a lady's wine."

Mr. Cludd said "No thank you" with such emphasis that I felt quite sure he agreed with her last sentiment.

Miss Harry Dray sat next him on the other side : she quaffed her wine with quite a gentlemanly relish.

"It's very good, indeed," she declared, "and has the full flavour of the——"

"Gooseberry !" suggested Mr. Cludd.

"Of the vine. In America, I believe, they speak of

currant and gooseberry vines. Perhaps the art of distilling champagne from those fruits was known to the early settlers, and the term arose thus."

Dear old Miss Wool praised the wine to me, but confessed, privately, it made her hiccough :

"It always does," she said, "the last time I drank any was at a wedding—I was a bride's-maid : I had been bridesmaid at three weddings in one year."

She sighed meekly, and I wondered whether on that far-off day she had been mindful of the saying that "three times a bridesmaid means soon a bride." I think so : for after a short pause, and another little sigh, she said gently and much more cheerfully :

"Everything turns out for the best : as things were, I was able to be with my dear sister in her widowhood, and her spirits were not equal to solitude. Had I gone to Nova Scotia I could not have been with her when she died."

She hardly seemed to be thinking of me, and I said nothing to remind her how young was the recipient of this small confidence : indeed, I felt half ashamed, as one who overhears a soliloquy.

Towards the end of supper there were further trials of Mr. Cludd's masculine orthodoxy. After dressed crab, served very hot in tiny china shells, liqueur glasses and liqueur-bottles appeared. But Mrs. Leland called it Cordial.

"This," she said, "is Peach Cordial : and this is Strawberry Cordial : both very digestive. As a digestive, Mrs. Darrell, you must try one : in case the turkey and the crab should quarrel with one another."

Of a most placable disposition, Mrs. Darrell could

hardly refuse what came in the guise of a peace-maker.

"Dear Mr. Darrell," she admitted, "would sometimes quite compel us to take a little Cherry Brandy : he held it to be sovereign against chill of the st— against any internal chill. I daresay Peach Cordial is the same."

She also sighed as she sipped at her small glass, but Mrs. Darrell's sigh was very comfortable : it bore no reference to what might have been, and was only a tribute to what had been, to a past pleasant and prosperous, that still almost formed part of a present prosperous and not unpleasant. She was, indeed, a widow : but then dear Mr. Darrell might have been a widower : and that would have been very sad.

After supper Miss Alicia sang her song, which took about a quarter of an hour, and had, of course, a regular plot, like most of the songs we knew and liked. Then Mr. Magnus sang *his* song, *The Village Blacksmith*, almost in character, so brawnily did he stand, and with such suggestive action did he lift his hand toward the chandelier when alluding to the spreading chestnut-tree. A very life-like touch was his sudden change to a fluty *false* *setto*, during the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth verses, where his daughter's voice seems to the blacksmith "like her mother's voice, singing in Paradise."

Mrs. Darrell unaffectedly wiped her eyes : dear Mr. Darrell was probably singing just like that in the same neighbourhood.

Hessy Thrush was next urged to gratify the company, and at first refused, half waywardly, half laughingly.

"I can't sing any regular songs," she declared. And old Harry Dray looked fully prepared to believe in the thorough irregularity of her ditties. But Mrs. Leland came over, and, with purring entreaty, pressed the girl to sing.

"Do," said her sister. "Hessy sings only her own verses to her own accompaniments," she told us.

Miss Broom looked as if she thought this almost preternatural. She had hardly, till that moment, ever realised that the songs we all knew had once been some individual person's own verses.

"Hessy," kind Miss Gibbs whispered loudly, "has a great deal of talent. Unformed talent."

"Ah! unformed!" murmured Miss Broom as if that mitigated the unnaturalness of such strange accomplishments.

Harry Dray settled herself grimly in her chair, and adjusted her heavy pebble bracelets coldly, prepared, obviously, for the worst. Hessy saw her, and gave a little laugh as she passed to the piano. Miss Swinkin mindful of hospitable neutrality, refused pointedly to catch Harry Dray's eye, but could go no further in toleration than banishing all expression from her cap and clasped hands. Mrs. Darrell closed her eyes to listen better, and presently her lips parted slightly too.

Hessy's fingers did odd things with the notes. She did not "cross," or lift her pretty hands with a sort of flapping alternation like Miss Alicia; she did not hit the keys, nor squeeze them: often she barely seemed to touch them, but they always had something to say in answer to her touch—if only one knew what it was. Sometimes it was a mere breathing, like the

caress of wind on leaves, sometimes very sad and plaintive, as of a wintry gust about a house forsaken. The chords were strange, occasionally almost painful : never noisy, though, nor strident : even beautiful, had we only had a key to the significance of their beauty. The words were not nearly so masterful as the air or the chords : the girl could not say in them whatever it was the music meant for her. But the voice itself was rich though plain, living and real, and every cadence had a pathos beggared by the mere syllables to which it was linked.

“Sang the throstle, ‘Come!’  
‘Whither?’ ‘Home.’  
‘I would wander  
Far afield.’  
‘Squander?’  
‘Seek for aught that strange may yield  
I am tired  
Of to-day,  
I am fired  
To be away,  
Where a light behind the mist  
Beckons, threatens if you list,  
Calls to anything untasted  
From days and hours wasted  
Since the days are short and few.’  
‘To the unproved?’  
‘From the unloved  
To the new.’  
And the wind cried  
‘Far and wide  
Do I rave,  
Do I roam,  
I’ve no home  
Nor a grave



I know the ocean's taste  
 All its bitter, all its waste ;  
 Wouldst be free  
 Like the sea ?  
 Salt and sorrowful thoul't be.  
 And the night shall be thine hour ;  
 And the storm and wrack thy power :  
 And thy laughing be like me.'"

"Is that the end?" asked her sister when Hussy stopped.

"No. It has no end."

But she would sing no more: and neither Miss Harry Dray nor Miss Swinkin looked sorry. Miss Broom was sure it must be very clever, she could make nothing of it.

"I liked the last part best," said Mrs. Darrell, nodding her head on her own account: it had been nodding of itself before. "The part about laughing. Cheerfulness is natural and right in young people."

"Young people have no business to be anything *but* cheerful," said Miss Harry Dray.

Miss Shrimpton and Miss Windsor had each a song, but they could not be prevailed upon to sing. After original compositions, they declared, nobody could care for their old songs. In vain Mrs. Leland pleaded for "Sweet and Low," and "Home they brought her warrior dead": only after much entreaty would they yield so far as to play *Zampa* together. But they did play it, and so vigorously that the little Dresden Shepherd and Shepherdess on the top of the piano vibrated, and began slowly to turn their backs on each other.

It was hardly finished before Miriam opened the

door and announced "Miss Dray's carriage": and Miriam could scarcely have got downstairs before she reappeared to announce "Miss Shrimpton's carriage": twice again she opened the door to advertise the arrival of Miss Windsor's and Miss Gibbs' carriage. And all this she did with such conviction that we almost pictured to ourselves a procession of broughams outside the Mount, though we knew quite well that the Gracechurch Arms had only one fly, so that all four ladies were going to their several homes in it. Miss Wool and the other ladies were walking, and Mr. Magnus escorted them. On party nights Mrs. Darrell slept at her sister's house in Church Street; after breakfast on the morrow they would return together to Overton Lodge.

We went down to the door and saw them off, congratulating them on the full moon, though no one, of course, ever dreamt of giving an evening party when there was *not* a full moon: it was a soft and windless night, and we could hear their voices and their pattering footsteps long after they had turned round the corner on to St. John's Hill. I can hear them still.

THE END

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